4. Concept of Human Nature

EVERY philosophy, every religion, every political system represents at bottom a theory of the nature of man. This is the primary and main question in philosophy. A political theory which does not start from a theory of human nature tends to become either pretentious or trivial. Political and social philosophy involves a search for 'a definition of man'. Philosophers and political thinkers differ in their answers to the question, 'What is Man ?' : one school may try to approach it in an abstract manner, another may view the question 'What is Man ?' as to mean 'What can man become ?', that is, whether or not man can control his own destiny, can 'make himself', can create a life for himself. This difference in approach is basically related to one's world-view. But what is common to all the philosophies is that this question finds its due recognition in the respective systems of thought. And Gandhi's political philosophy is no exception to this general pattern of philosophic thought.

Gandhi's sociological views on civilization, and more particularly, his theory of ethics—which is the basis of his political philosophy—were largely based upon his assumptions regarding human nature and human perfectibility. His theory of individual reformation and conversion can be understood only in the light of his concept of human nature.

Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence aimed at reconstructing, rewiring and reconditioning man has generally evoked sceptic derision. Even sympathetic reviewers of his philosophy have pointed out that Gandhi expected the impossible from human nature and took an over-optimistic view of man and

his ability to achieve the good. Critics hold that his philosophy, at its best, may remain an idealist's dream. One gets the impression from the critics' views that the practical Gandhi yielded place to the saint Gandhi. On the other hand, Gandhi claimed himself as being not a visionary but a practical idealist.[1] One may or may not agree to his concept of human nature, but it is admitted by one and all that he had a keen sense and profound grasp of human psychology. The strategy he outlined and the tactics he adopted throughout his long and eventful public career testify to this.

Now, let us proceed to see the psychological assumptions of his social and political philosophy.

Gandhi's views about human nature were bound up indissolubly with his metaphysical assumptions and the ethical principles he considered to be fundamental. Man for him was not a physico-chemical aggregation, but a spiritual entity. He was concerned not only with man's being, but also with his becoming. From 'being' to 'becoming' is a fundamental philosophical issue, and as such, understanding of the problem varies. We are, however, not concerned with that wider philosophical issue ; our purpose here is to make a probe into how Gandhi understood the problem.

Gandhi inherited the ancient Indian traditions, but he did not accept the traditions blindly ; what was characteristic of him was that he infused a new dynamic element into the traditional passive attitude of our people by utilizing "the new positive ideas of modern India by assimilating them in thought, living them in his life, and giving them social and political shapes."[2] Prof. Dhirendra Mohan Datta correctly observes : "This entire concrete process, and experience gave birth to his own philosophy of man and life...."[3] Gandhi's philosophy of man has to be viewed in this background.

For thousands of years, both in the East and in the West, a certain view of human nature prevailed which represented man as possessing a two-fold nature, part angel, part beast. Gandhi also believed that "In our present state, we are partly men and partly beasts...."[4] "Every one of us is a

mixture of good and evil. Is there not plenty of evil in us ? There is enough in me...and I always pray to God to purge me of it. The difference that there is between human beings is the difference of degree."[5]

Man and the Brute

Gandhi admitted man's animal ancestry. "We were, perhaps, all originally brutes. I am prepared to believe that we have become men by a slow process of evolution from the brute."[6] Again, "Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him, he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb...the downward instinct is embodied in them (men)..."[7]

Is man's nature all evil ? Gandhi emphatically asserted : "Man's nature is not essentially evil. Brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature."[8] And, "Human nature will only find itself when it fully realizes that to be human it has to cease to be beastly or brutal. Though we have the human form, without the attainment of the virtue of non-violence we still share the qualities of our remote reputed ancestor, the oranoutang."[9]

Gandhi did not look upon man as a mere brute. He regarded man as, above all, the soul. He believed that "the dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—to the strength of the spirit."[10] What distinguishes man from the brute ? In his words : "We were born with brute strength, but we were born in order to realize God who dwells in us. That indeed is the privilege of man and it distinguishes him from the brute creation."[11] The essential difference between man and the brute, according to Gandhi, is that the former can respond to the call of the spirit in him, can rise superior to the passions that he owns in common with the brute and, therefore, superior to selfishness and violence, which belong to the brute-nature and not to the immortal spirit of man. Gandhi understood that as being the fundamental conception of Hinduism.[12]

Man and God

We have observed earlier that Gandhi's views about human nature were derived from his metaphysical notions. His views on the nature of soul and its limitless potentiality for progress lead to some of his important conclusions about human nature. (For his concept of soul, see pp. 88-89 *supra.*) He repeatedly said that it was more natural for man to be good than to be evil, though, apparently, descent might seem easier than ascent.[13] He believed that "the divine powers within us are infinite." Because of this divine element in man, it was his firm belief that man is by nature going higher.[14] He spoke of man as the part (*aṃśa*) of God or of the Divine power. Sometimes, again, he looked upon every man as the incarnation of God (*Jīv-mātra īsvarke avatār hāi*). He was fond of quoting the Mohammedan saying : *ādam khudā nahīṅ : lekin khudāke nūrse ādam judā nahīṅ*—Man is not God ; but neither is he different from the light (or spark) of God. Dr. D. M. Datta, after noting this fond citation of Gandhi, observes : "Here again we find his preference for some type of identity-indifference relation which is differently maintained by the Vaishnava Vedantists and in recent times by Tagore. The Shankarites are advocates of rigid identity. Gandhi tries to keep his conception of man and God mobile and dynamic by thinking of God as force, as life, etc., as if to make him admit divergent lines of a manifestation, incarnation and inspiration."[14]

The Oneness of Man

Fundamentally, Gandhi believed, as we have seen in ch. 3, in what he called the "absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity". "What though we have many bodies ? We have but one soul. The rays of the sun are many through refraction. But they have the same source."[15] His belief in "the essential unity of God and man and for that matter all that lives"[16] has been stated by one commentator as being similar to the Stoic idea of the universe as a divine whole and of mankind as an essential unity in which the individual could realize himself.[17]

The implications of the doctrine of man's oneness with God and humanity have been touched upon, howsoever briefly, in our discussion on Gandhi's metaphysical outlook. It does not bear repetition here. For a summary enumeration of these implications one may refer to a recent study by N. Raghavan Iyer.[18]

Man and His Enviornment

We have seen in ch. 3 (p. 102 *supra*) that Gandhi, while admitting that man actually lived by habit, laid stress on the exercise of will.[19] Self-direction involves for Gandhi passing judgements on one's own behaviour, justifying or condemning it. He recognized that inspite of the greatest effort for being detached, no man can altogether undo the effects of his environment or his upbringing. But he did not consider man to be merely a creature of circumstance. One may or may not agree to his views about remoulding human destiny, but there is no reason why one should fail to appreciate his philosophy of activism and his intense regard for *puruṣakāra*. This element of dynamism and regard for man's self-direction could enable him to say that "It is man's privilege to overcome adverse circumstances."[20]

Self-restraint, Gandhi believed, is a positive factor in man's life for overcoming the adverse circumstances. As he said in his *Autobiography*, "The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint." Self-restraint implies control of the baser tendencies like hatred and selfishness, and informing life with goodwill and love.

Gandhi recognized the influence of environment on a man's character and that was why he was for changing the environment as it was given. "It is because the rulers, if they are bad, are so, not necessarily or wholly by reason of birth, but largely because of their environment, that I have hopes of their altering their course. ...If they are dominated by their environment, they do not surely deserve to be killed, but should be changed by a change of environment."[21]

Faith in Human Nature

Gandhi declared himself to be 'an irrepressible optimist'. His optimism rested upon his belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop non-violence. In his words, "The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes, till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might oversweep the world."[22] The very basis of the philosophy of non-violence is grounded on the belief in the efficacy of conversion as a method of winning the opponent. It was one of his fundamental beliefs. In 1920 he said : "I refuse to suspect human nature."[23] In 1926 (*Young India*, 25.12.26) he wrote : "The most practical, the most dignified way of going on in the world is to take people at their word, when you have no positive reason to the contrary. I refuse to believe that the tendency of the human nature is always downward." A few months later (*Young India*, 3. 2. 27) he declared : 'Men like me cling to their faith in human nature...all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding."

Gandhi placed man above institutions. He categorically stated : "Man and his deed are two distinct things It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of the one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a human being is to slight those divine powers, and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world."[24] Or, "I have discovered, that man is superior to the system he propounded. And so I feel, that, Englishmen, as individuals, are infinitely better than the system they have evolved as a corporation."[25]

Human perfectibility

Gandhi did not expect complete realization of the ideal. Though "Human life is a series of compromises and it is not always easy to achieve in practice what one had found to be true in theory",[26] Gandhi exhorted not to lower the ideal of human development. "Let us be sure of our ideal. We shall

ever fail to realize it, but shall never cease to realize it."[27] He believed that "satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment. Full effort is full victory."[28]* An idealist like Gandhi could only proclaim : "The virtue of an ideal consists in its boundlessness. But although religious ideals must thus from their very nature remain unattainable by imperfect human beings, although by virtue of their boundlessness they may seem ever to recede farther and farther away from us, the nearer we go to them, still they are closer to us than our very hands and feet because we are more certain of their reality and truth than even our own physical being. This faith in ideal constitutes real life, in fact, it is man's all in all."[29]

"Man," according to Gandhi, "will ever remain imperfect, and it will always be his part to be perfect."[30] He knew that man at the present stage of his being was not perfect, but that did not negate the theoretical possibility of further development which amounted to his perfectibility. This idea of human perfectibility is a key-point for the philosophy of non-violence. And this belief logically leads to the conclusion of conversion and remaking of man. In his words : "In the application of the method of non-violence, one must believe in the possibility of every person, however depraved, being reformed under humane and skilled treatment."[31] Or, as he put it : "When I was a little child, there used to be two blind performers in Rajkot. One of them was a musician. When he played on his instrument, his fingers swept the strings with an unerring instinct and everybody listened spell-bound to his playing. Similarly there are chords in every human heart. If we only know how to strike the right chord, we bring out the music."[32] The rationality of human nature is the pre-condition for its theoretical perfectibility.

A believer in rebirth[33] (see p. 99 *supra*), it was only natural for him to believe that moral progress made in this life would be of avail to us in the after-life. Thus his faith in human perfectibility was not merely a moral conviction, but was ultimately based upon his metaphysical assumptions.

* cf. "Not the possession of truth, but the effort in struggling to attain it, brings joy to the searcher."—G. E. Lessing

Conclusion

The brief outline given above of Gandhi's concept of human nature reveals that *ātman*—man as the subjective entity—was the methodological postulate of his social and political philosophy. That explains why he, on all occasions, laid emphasis on the regeneration of man. The Greek philosophers put the primacy on *polis* and the Roman thinkers stressed the *civitas*, while the Renaissance philosophers upheld the ideal of *l'uomo universale*—'an all-sided man' or the autonomous man who had no inner connection with God. Gandhi, true to the traditions of Indian Idealist philosophy, recognized the primacy of spirit over matter. The philosophical background being such, it was but natural that the subjectivist and moral note would pervade Gandhian writings through and through.

Gandhi adhered to the concept of religious remaking of human nature as antecedent to social and political transformation. But from this, it would be too much of an over-simplification to conclude that he was not interested in institutional changes or that his interest in social-political transformation was only marginal. His unbroken record of struggle stretching over fifty-odd years belies this sort of understanding—rather, perverted understanding. His whole life symbolised the spirit of struggle—non-violent, undoubtedly—against all sorts of oppression and inequality, be it racial, colour, caste or class. He laid down concrete programmes as he saw his light. This active compaigning testifies that he wanted a structural change in the iniquitous social order and political set-up. His approach was indeed individual-moral, since he believed that the human heart held the key to all social and political dynamics ; but then again, the individual—a morally regenerated individual—of his conception was not someone living in isolation from the society nor was it a conceptual category abstracted from the organic whole, i.e., the society. What is more important to note is that in a static society like India—"a community of obedience" as it was called —where life appeared as a fatalistically determined phenomenon, he, by his repudiation of the theory of permanent inelasticity of human nature, introduced a new element of dynamism in the

field of human action. While no credit is due to him for any novelty in the concept of dynamic and active human nature (he did not, in fact, claim any originality for himself), the reaffirmation of this thinking was itself of much significance. Criticism may be made of his views about human nature from rationalist and materialist points of view and one may hold that the concrete man as an ensemble of social relations has received inadequate attention in comparison to his stress on ideal man ; but that should not blind one's vision so as not to be able to grasp the point of departure for his philosophy—the individual : fearless, self-restrained and self-conscious. This insistence on the regeneration of the individual may be interpreted to have introduced the bourgeois concept of sovereignty of the individual (in that case, it is to be understood in a deep sociological sense and in no other sense), but it may be presumed that it served a necessary function for awakening the slumbering masses of India from their semi-comatic condition. Without a band of idealistically-inspired individuals, no movement for political emancipation or social reform could take its stride. The ascetic rigour and the puritan ethical discipline that a *satyāgrahī* was obliged to undergo was necessary for such a purpose. It was a *psychologically necessary basis* for action. P. Spratt is right when he observes that "those to whom puritanism is entirely hateful and despicable should consider it in relation to the sleepy society it was designed to awaken."[34] The spiritual and ethical notes have to be related to the concrete social context for a better appreciation of his views.

Another point. Concept of the nature of man stands at the root of any and every humanism. Gandhi's humanism was essentially a spiritual humanism (of this, more later on) and this humanism was rooted in the traditions of this country. As an eminent Indian sociologist put it : "The Indian renaissances have never turned the mind and achievements of Man away from the Absolute, Personal or Impersonal."[35] This cultural background has to be taken account of in any study of Gandhi's concept of human nature. Whether the theo-centric Asiatic

type of humanism or the man-centred Marxian socialist humanism will prevail is a matter of judgement which involves one's understanding of the process of history and of man's role as the maker of history as well as of himself.

5. Interpretation of History

EVERY theory of social action is ultimately a philosophy of history.[1]* Gandhi's theory of social and political action was rooted in his basic concept of history, for history is the beginning and the end of ways of living. Gandhi was not a philosopher of history in the sense that Hegel, Michelet, Vico or Marx was. But to dismiss his claim to that standing on the ground that he did not systematize his views or did not offer any original interpretation, or that the concept of history that he had is not intelligible in the modern sense of the term, may give us the idle pleasure of suspending our judgement—judgement that demands a close scrutiny of his views pronounced on different occasions—and that would be, to put it mildly, an intellectual folly.

What was the lesson Gandhi drew from the succession of historical events, or, from what appeared to him to be 'the general laws governing the course of events' ? Gandhi subscribed to the view that inspite of temporary setbacks, mankind had steadily progressed so far and it would progress still further. That was one of his fundamental beliefs.

In 1926 he wrote : "Human society is a ceaseless growth, an unfoldment in terms of spirituality."[2] Gandhi's concept of spirituality should be understood not in terms of escape from life, as it is understood conventionally. We have seen earlier in our discussion of his metaphysical outlook that he

* cf. "...any general theory or philosophy of politics supposes a previous theory of human progress and that is the same thing as philosophy of history." —John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, London, Second Edition, MDCCCLXIII, p. 162.

held that life was an unity. "I do not believe that the spiritual law works on a field of its own. On the contrary, it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and political fields."[3] Gandhi's concept of spirituality may be compared to William James' definition of spiritualism. "Spiritualism", said James, "means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and letting loose of hope."[4]

An earnest believer in God, Gandhi subscribed to the belief or philosophy that "all life in its essence is one, and that the humans are working consciously or unconsciously towards the realization of that identity." "This belief", Gandhi held, "requires a living faith in a living God who is the ultimate arbiter of our fate. Without him not a blade of grass moves."[5]

This statement of Gandhi comes close to that of the Christian view of history. Collingwood, in his celebrated book, *The Idea of History*, explaining the 'revolutionary effect of Christian thought' 'on the way in which history was conceived', wrote : "A new attitude towards history grew up, according to which the historical process is the working-out not of man's purposes but of God's ; God's purpose being a purpose for man, a purpose to be embodied in human life and through the activity of human wills, God's part in this working-out being limited to predetermining the end and to determining from time to time the object which human beings desire. Thus each human agent knows what he wants and pursues it, but he does not know why he wants it : the reason why he wants it is that God has caused him to want it in order to advance the process of realizing His purpose...."[6]

Gandhi's statement may suggest theological determinism which, when carried to its extreme limits, can lead to the philosophy of Occasionalism.[7] We shall discuss presently how far his philosophy of history was determined by his fundamental faith in God as being the supreme determinant of things and movements in the world.

To Gandhi, the significance of history lay in terms of unfolding the twin principles of Truth and Non-violence. Whenever man acts in answer to the imperatives of these principles there is

progress ; decline comes about when there is an interruption of these forces. He wrote : "History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul...History, then, is a record of an interruption of the course of nature. Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history."[8] And, "I believe that the sum total of the energy of mankind is not to bring us down but to lift us up, and that is the result of the definite, if unconscious, working of the law of love."[9]

Gandhi conceived the progress of history to be one-directional. To quote him : "If we turn our eyes to the time of which history has any record down to our own time, we shall find that man has been steadily progressing towards *ahimsa*. Our remote ancestors were cannibals. Then came a time when they were fed up with cannibalism and they began to live on chase. Next came a stage when man was ashamed of leading the life of a wandering hunter. He therefore took to agriculture and depended principally on mother earth for his food. Thus from being a nomad he settled down to civilized stable life, founded villages and towns, and from member of a family he became member of a community and a nation. All these are signs of progressive *ahimsa* and diminishing *himsa*."[10]*

He held that "Man as animal is violent, but as Spirit is non-violent." That is why he was enough of an optimist to declare : "If we believe that mankind has steadily progressed towards *ahimsa*, it follows that it has to progress towards it still further." For "Nothing in this world is static, everything is kinetic. If there is no progression, then there is inevitable regression. No one can remain without the eternal cycle, unless it be God himself."[11]

As one interpreter of Indian history has correctly pointed out : "Gandhi's view of history is essentially ethical and spiritual and comes close to the ancient Indian view that human history

* cf. "The social order has reached its present level not as a result of violence, but in spite of it."—Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God and Peace Essays*, Tr : Aylmer Maude, Oxford University Press, London, 1936, p. 312.

is the unfolding of man's waywardness constantly checked by divine will and love."[12]

Gandhi subscribed to the teleological belief that "Ultimately it is the Unseen Power that governs the course of events—even in the minds of men who make...those events."[13] This shows that he accepted the theory of divine determinism in history. But this should not lead us to infer that this determinism, as he conceived it, degenerated into fatalism. His interpretation of the *Gītā* and *Karmayoga* introduced an active element of human endeavour, and not a fatalistic surrender to the unknown forces of nature and life. He combined a faith in the supremacy of God with the insistence on constant actions (for his views on *karma*, see pp. 99-102. *supra*).

We have observed earlier that he conceived progress to be one-directional, in the direction of progressive *ahiṃsā*. But does this mean that he accepted a unilinear trend of progress ? For Gandhi, human history is neither a unilinear trend of progress nor a static picture of eternal recurrence, but rather a spiral-like movement that is determined by the power of spirit over matter within the limits of the course plotted out by *karma*.

To quote Gandhi : "Life is not one straight road. There are so many complexities in it. It is not like a train which, once started, keeps on running."[14]

While rejecting the unilinear view of history he did not doubt about the fundamental direction of progress—progress in terms of non-violence, that is, in terms of human morality. His interpretation of history, briefly outlined above, suggests that he had supreme faith in the divine governance of the cosmic and the human processes. Because of this spiritual interpretation it was but natural and logical on his part to reject the Marxian view of history.

Marxian view of history

Marxism has traditionally viewed history as essentially a one-directional process. Capitalism inevitably generates the forces which will in due course produce socialism ; and socialism, once

established, equally inevitably evolves towards the full classless society of communism. To be sure, this process was never thought of as being smooth and continuous. The movement is zigzag, spiral-like. The transition from capitalism to socialism would have to be a revolutionary jump, and counter-revolutionary setbacks could not be ruled out. But the fundamental direction of change is not doubted.

Belief in Human Progress : Area of agreement

Belief in human progress is the common point with Marxism and Gandhism. But there ends the agreement and the agreement also is on surface only, for the basic approach rests on different grounds. While we do not propose to make a comparative study of the Marxian and the Gandhian philosophy of history, we shall have at least to delineate Gandhi's reactions to the Marxian philosophy of history.

"I do not believe", said Gandhi, "that it is *prakriti* (matter) which originates and governs the thought-processes of *Purusa* (spirit)."[15] He believed in the power of the spirit of man to shape its environment to some extent and thus affect the course of history. He explicitly rejected the materialist conception of history.

Gandhi's critique of the materialist conception of history

Marxism has generally been understood, or rather, misunderstood, to be a form of economic determinism which it is definitely not. Lack of systematic treatment of this subject by Marx and Engels, deliberate misrepresentation and distortion by some of the bourgeois critics and mechanistic understanding by a large body of adherents of Marxism have helped to spread this wrong impression about materialist view of history. Gandhi understood Marxist philosophy in that general and current sense. He could not be credited with a thorough acquaintance with and comprehensive understanding of Marxism. As is well known, it was during his last detention at Poona that he read Marxian literature. On the fly-leaf of *A Handbook of Marxism* he scribbled : "All for each and each for all."

"From each according to his ability to each according to his needs." This, to him, was the quintessence of the teaching of Marx.[16] As Pyarelal reports, Marxism, to Gandhi however, was not the only way or even the best way of achieving this goal.[17]

Gandhi, when asked to 'give his appraisal of some aspects of the Marxist philosophy', said : "I do not agree that our ideologies, ethical standards and values are altogether a product of our material environment without any absolute basis outside it. On the contrary as we are so our environment becomes."[18]

Gandhi continued : "The Marxist regards thought, as it were, 'a secretion of the brain' and the mind 'a reflex of the material environment'. I cannot accept that. Above and beyond both matter and mind is He. If I have an awareness of that living principle within me, no one can fetter my mind. The body might be destroyed, the spirit will proclaim its freedom. This to me is not a theory ; it is a *fact of experience*."[19]

He further added : "What has made the teaching of Marx dynamic is that he regarded mankind as a whole and transcending class divisions identified himself with the cause of the poor oppressed toilers of the world. But in that he is not alone. Others besides him have done the same."[20]

But paying compliment did not mean for him dittoing what he could not accept as true. He rejected the Marxian interpretation of the causes of wars. The role of the individual was central to Gandhi's view of history.*

To quote him : "Supposing Hitler were to die today, it would alter the whole course of human history. Similarly, supposing all capitalists were wiped out as a result of an earthquake or some other natural cataclysm, the history of class-war would then be changed in a way least dreamt of

*But man, according to Gandhi, is nothing when he sets himself up against the divine purpose of the universe. "Napoleon planned much and found himself a prisoner in St. Helena. The mighty Kaiser aimed at the crown of Europe and is reduced to the status of a private gentleman...Let us contemplate such examples and be humble."—*Young India*, 9.10. 1924, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, The Publications Division, Govt. of India, Delhi, 1967, Vol. XXV, p. 222.

by the exponents of economic interpretation of history. Would not the history of the present war have been different if instead of Chamberlain a more dynamic figure had been the Prime Minister of England? Or, if Chamberlain had not shown lack of political courage at the last moment?" "The Marxists say", Pyarelal interjected, "that to abolish war we have but to abolish the institution of private property. You have also taught that property is incompatible with the non-violent way of life." Gandhi: "This is only partly true. Was not Helen of Troy the cause of the Trojan War? Were the wars of the Rajputs related to the institution of private property? No. To banish war we have to do more. We have to eradicate possessiveness and greed and lust and egotism from our own hearts. We have to carry war within ourselves to banish it from society."[21]

This brief survey shows that Gandhi rejected outright the Marxian philosophy of history. This rejection stood broadly on three grounds: (1) Marxism is a reductionism, reducing everything to the economic factor, (2) Marxism denies or underrates the role of individuals, and (3) Marxism is a materialist philosophy.

Marxian position: a brief exposition

Let us take up the last point first. As a metaphysical idealist, Gandhi had every reason to differ from the materialist philosophy as interpreted and given a new shape by Marx and Engels. While he could legitimately disagree, from his own point of view, with the materialist approach of Marxism, it seems that he had not properly grasped the fundamental philosophical stand of Marxism. He understood Marxism to be a variant of mechanistic materialism, while the founders of this doctrine ceaselessly waged attack in their philosophical writings —the tradition was carried further by Lenin—against mechanistic view of life and universe. The basic fact of materialism for Marx was not the reduction of mind to matter but the priority of matter to mind in the course of evolution and the dependence of mind on matter. But when mind appears as the

highest function of matter it is immensely potent, since consciousness and knowledge make an immense, qualitative difference to human behaviour. Indeed they make man free.[22] The relationship between mind and matter is dialectical. Gandhi did not or could not perceive this dialectical nature of relationship between mind and matter. And hence could he comment that according to Marxism, thought is 'a secretion of the brain' and mind 'a reflex of the material environment'.

This is no place for expounding the fundamental philosophical postulates of Marxism, and we need not enter into a discussion of Marxism as such. But a few passing references are deemed necessary for making out that Gandhi's understanding of Marxism was not correct in all its aspects. To put it briefly : While he was right in estimating the ethical core and underlining the humanistic content or, to use an idealist phrase, the essence of Marxism, he could not comprehend the fundamental dialectial materialist approach which distinguishes itself as a science as against all sorts of vulgar, mechanistic materialism and utopian ideals of regeneration of mankind and reconstruction of society. It is not in a spirit of polemic, but as an expression of our understanding of Gandhi's view of history vis-à-vis Marxism, that this comment is offered here.

Now to turn to the Marxian interpretatian of history, commonly referred to as historical materialism. As for the charge that Marxism reduces everything to economic motives, or that it is economic determinism, let us see for ourselves the position held by the co-founder of scientific socialism.

Engels in a letter to H. Starkenburg, dated London, 25 January, 1894, wrote : "Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone* active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself."[23]

In another letter to J. Bloch, dated London, 21 September, 1890, Engels was more elaborate and specific.

"According to the materialist conception of history the determining element* in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, forms of law, and then even the reflexes of all these in the minds of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma—also exercise their influence upon the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate their *form*. There is an intersection of all these elements in which, amid all the endless *host* of accidents,...the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary...there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant, the historical event...Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger writers sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights."[24]

It is perhaps a sad commentary on Marx's and Engels' power of communication that even nearly a century later this should have to be dwelt on. Again and again they insisted that historical materialism was not a dogma, not a formula, but an empirical science and a guide to concrete study and historical investigation. And yet, again and again widespread opinion, both lay and critical, both within the Marxian movement and without, persists in treating it as though it were the reverse. "*Our conception of history*", Engels wrote in a letter to Conrad Schmidt, "*is above all a guide to history, not a lever for construction.* ...All history must be studied

* *Moment*—element in the dialectical process of becoming. (Ed. Eng. ed)

afresh, the conditions of existence of the different forms of society must be individually examined before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-legal, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., notions corresponding to them."[25] (Emphasis added)

The excerpts we have quoted above are quite specific. They repudiate all mechanistic or 'reductive' views of history's determination.

It has been generally supposed that Marxism denies any significant role to the individual. This is a misrepresentation of the Marxian philosophy of history. According to the historical materialist conception, the activity of men cannot but be of enormous significance in history. Plekhanov in his small but significant tract *The Role of The Individual in History* demolished the wrong and perverted theses attributed to Marxism.

To quote Plekhanov : "While some subjectivists, striving to ascribe the widest possible role to the 'individual' in history, refused to recognise the historical progress of mankind as a process expressing laws, some of their later opponents, striving to bring out more sharply the coherent character of this progress, were evidently prepared to forget that *men make history, and therefore, the activities of individuals cannot help being important in history.* They have declared the individual to be a *quantité négligeable.* In theory, this extreme is as impermissible as the one reached by the more ardent subjectivists. It is as unsound to sacrifice the *thesis* to *the antithesis* as to forget the antithesis for the sake of the *thesis.* The correct point of view will be found when we succeed in uniting the points of truth contained in them into a *synthesis.*"[26]

He further said : "...by virtue of particular traits of their character, individuals can influence the fate of society. Sometimes this influence is very considerable ; but the possibility of exercising this influence, and its extent, are determined by the relation of forces within it. The character of an individual is a 'factor' in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such."[27]

We have discussed in chap. 1 about the role of great men in history and about what constitutes 'greatness' in socio-historical field according to the Hegelian-Marxian concept. But since the question of the powerful impact of great men on history has arisen here in connection with Gandhi's critique of the Marxian interpretation of history, we would like to let Plekhanov state what Marxism stands for.

> "A great man is great not because his personal qualities give individual features to great historical events, but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great needs of his time, needs which arose as a result of general and particular causes. Carlyle, in his well-known book on heroes and hero-worship, calls great men *beginners*. This is a very apt description. A great man is precisely a beginner because he sees *further* than others, and desires things *more strongly* than others. ...But he is not a hero in the sense that he can stop, or change, the natural course of things, but in the sense that his activities are the conscious and free expression of this inevitable and unconscious course. Herein lies all his significance ; herein lies his whole power. But this significance is colossal, and the power is terrible."[28]

This sums up the historical materialist attitude, and no further discussion is necessary.

Gandhi's concept of Time : philosophical background

Gandhi's view of history, we believe, can be better appreciated in the context of Indian thought and tradition. This becomes apparent if we care to see that history as understood in the modern western sense of the term had no appeal for Gandhi. As Dr. D. M. Datta observes : "Regarding Gandhi's conception of space and time we find that he was influenced by the general Indian ideas about them."[29] A very sympathetic reviewer of Hinduism remarks : "One of the characteristics of ancient Hindu thought is its indifference to history."[30]

Prof. D. P. Mukerji in his study on *Western Influence on Indian Culture* observed : "many of those who have made India's history had little or no western 'sense of history' at all. (Gandhiji had none. His conception was essentially Indian, i.e., qualitative,

vertical, 'heroic' and moral.)"[30]* According to Indian philosophy, Time is without a beginning and without an end.** History is conceived to be a pattern of timeless moments. T. S. Eliot once declared that the study of Indian metaphysics left him in a state of enlightened mystification. When the vision of the eternal dawns, he tells us, effort and exploration are forgotten in the discovery of the already known ; beginning and end are one. 'In my beginning is my end.'

"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable."

It has been said that the profundity of Indian philosophy is, as it were, only two-dimensional since it ignores systematically the metaphysical and spiritual significance of time and history.[32] According to this view of Indian philosophy, "Indian thought seeking Absolute Truth (whatever its name), is driven to sublimate space into infinite (*ananta* in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*) rather than time into eternity. Its goal is, psychologically, the boundless rather than the timeless, since there is no inward feeling for the time dimension at all. And the *Bṛhadāraṇyka Upaniṣad* gives us the final picture of this Absolute, as seen by the Indian mind, when it claims that it is 'this imperishable Being' across which 'is space woven, warp and woof'."[33]

The Reverend Bryan de Krester observes : "Hindu man has no sense of a decisive or significant 'now' in any historical event. When a man believes that his life reaches back into the infinite past and that his future is equally limitless, he can have no awareness of a need for critical action. Unlimited historical life

* cf. "The Gandhian attitude towards morality and politics was a reaction from the intellectual to the intuitive standpoint congenial to the Hindu mind·····Mahatma Gandhi brought about an approximation and even identification of the nationalist aspirations with the intuitive, timeless and humble morality of the Indian masses. There was no place in it of so exotic a refinement as historical consciousness···"—Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Intellectual in India*, Vir Publishing House,New Delhi, 1967,p. 53.

** "Time is without limit and the world is wide."—Bhavabhūti

must 'sag' under the burden of an endless vista of recurrent existence. And secondly, a cyclic interpretation of history destroys the meaningfulness of life, and because its origins are in *avidyā* its 'end' can have no true value. In the final analysis, Hinduism reduces all life to a fatuity. History is mere froth and bubble."[34]

One may object to this interpretation of Indian philosophy as being an oversimplification of a complex theory of existence, and may also point out that ancient Greece too seems to have suffered from such a metaphysical load, if Collingwood is to be taken for granted.[35]*

The concept of time or *kāla* is either that of a 'blind and insentient power, much like the western conceptions of fate, necessity and destiny or as the supreme conscious power identical with the absolute reality or even as subordinate power immediately responsive to the supreme will.' In fact, there was no unanimity about the nature of *kāla* except on a point or two. In the Śāntiparva of the *Mahābhārata* there are three uses of the word, one interpreted as *avyakta*, another as *jīva*, and a third as *māyā śabala brahma*.

The Naiyāyikas, Vaiśeṣikas and Mīmāṃsakas conceived it as a static principle, substantial, eternal and ubiquitous in character and held it responsible for our notions of priority and posteriority —temporal sequence or succession ; whereas, according to the exponents of the Āgama, it is the supreme dynamic principle lying at the root of the cosmic process, both of creation and of destruction. To the *yogin* of the Patañjali school, however, it is only a mental construction based on a sense of succession and has no value in reality.[36]

A discussion about the other schools like the Jaina, the Śaiva, the Bhāgavat and the Śākta may not be necessary.

* "Ancient Greek thought as a whole has a very definite prevailing tendency not only uncongenial to the growth of historical thought but actually based, one might say, on a rigorously anti-historical metaphysics. History is a science of human action ; what the historian puts before himself is things that men have done in the past, and these belong to a world of change, a world where things come to be and cease to be. Such things, according to the Greek metaphysical view, ought not to be knowable and therefore history ought to be impossible."—R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford University Press, London, 1946, p. 20.

D. P. Mukerji in his study of *Philosophy of Indian History* observed : "*Kala's* function as the source of nature's dynamism is one, while the ascent of the soul through various stages to a stage when time is transcended (known as *kalatyag*) and becomes one with the absolute reality, is another. Apparently, such a transcendental view of *kala* is most useful for individual salvation, evolution and conversion ; it has a philosophy of change, but the change is of the individual....Speculative philosophy may steer clear of the collective need, but practical philosophy does not. People always want a *kriya* to support the concept of *kala*. This, of course, our philosophies sought to do through their concept of *bisvakalyana*, the external manifestation of *kriya-shakti* keeping its own nature as *svatmabisyanta* (self-contained) by virtue of its capacity to represent *svatantra-shakti* (supreme freedom) of the Absolute."[37]

It is in terms of these basic Indian notions that Gandhi's concept of time, that is, of history, is to be understood.

Gandhi's conception of human nature is dependent on his interpretation of history as well as his view of cosmic evolution. We have discussed in a previous chapter his views on human perfectibility. To believe in human perfectibility in the context of politics and society is 'to invert Hobbes',[38] as one commentator has aptly put it, and therein lies the true significance of his views. One may or may not agree with his subjective approach towards history—that is a matter of one's understanding and commitment. But the key element of his views is to be found in his hope that the ideals of truth and non-violence would ultimately triumph. "A few thousand years", Gandhi said, "are but a speck in the vast time circle."[39] Faith in this eternal, vast time circle explains his great patience and incorrigible optimism about redemption of mankind.

6. Ethical Basis

TOYNBEE in the last volume of his monumental study writes : "The power of creative suffering must be evident to anyone of my age ; for the generation into which I happen to have been born has not only been Hitler's generation in the West and Stalin's in Russia : it also has been Gandhi's in India ; and it can already be forecast with some confidence that Gandhi's effect on human history is going to be greater and more lasting than either Stalin's or Hitler's."[1]* One may or may not share the great historian's confidence ; or one may not, while accepting the spirit of the statement, like the manner in which it has been posed. But that is of secondary importance. The contraposition of two types of political leaders—one who believed in moral nihilism in politics and another who introduced and stressed upon morality as the motive and determinant of politics —is interesting and deserves close attention.

Gandhi has generally been acknowledged to be a great moral teacher. There had been a host of predecessors who preached ethical norms to be followed in personal life as also in interpersonal relations. But it was Gandhi who for the first time asserted that morality should be the ultimate authority in the

* Summing up Stalin's rule in 1948, Isaac Deutscher said that "Stalin cannot be classed with Hitler, among the tyrants whose record is one of absolute worthlessness and futility. Hitler was the leader of a sterile counter-revolution, while Stalin has been both the leader and the exploiter of a tragic, self-contradictory but creative revolution. The better part of Stalin's work is as certain to outlast Stalin himself as the better parts of the work of Cromwell and Napoleon have outlasted them·····in order to save the better part of Stalin's work for the future and to give to it its full value, history may yet have to cleanse and reshape Stalin's work as sternly as it once cleansed and reshaped the work of the English Revolution after Cromwell and of the French after Napoleon."—*Stalin*, Pelican Books, 1966, p. 612.

conduct of human affairs, in the spheres of economics, politics, society etc. Moralization of politics had been the dream of many political thinkers, to make it a reality had been the endeavour of Gandhi. The introduction of and emphasis upon morality in corporate life compels one's admiration for Gandhi.

It may be argued that politics itself is morally neutral or is amoral in its nature and as such ethical theory has no relevance to political philosophy. This is a problem into which we cannot go here, for it would take us far too afield with very little prospect of solving it. Politics, in theory, we agree with R. Osborn,[2] should serve the end of freeing men from the economic and social limitations on their freedom. Unfortunately, politics tends to become an end in itself, an exercise of power for the sake of power by men who have lost sight of, or never had, any moral objectives. It is against this approach towards politics that the relevance of ethics to political theory is most sharply felt.* The Greek notion of their interdependence may be recalled. But in modern age, one must look to Gandhi to rediscover the moral basis of politics, not in theory alone but in practice as well.

Reinhold Neibuhr finds "a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperatives of a sensitive conscience." This conflict—briefly defined as the conflict between ethics and politics—"is made inevitable", he argues, "by the double focus of the moral life. One focus is in the inner life of the individual, and the other in the necessities of man's social life. From the perspective of society the highest moral ideal is justice. From the perspective of the individual the highest ideal is unselfishness....These two moral perspectives are not mutually exclusive and the contradiction between them is not absolute. But neither are they easily harmonised."[3] It is here that one may turn to Gandhi's philosophy, for it claims harmonization of this seeming contradiction.

* cf. "The realm of politics is a twilight zone where ethical and technical issues meet."—Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man And Immoral Society*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons Ltd., London, 1947, p. 171.

Dr. R. C. Majumdar while paying his "profound respect for Gandhi, the saint and the humanitarian" arrives at the conclusion that "Gandhi was lacking in both political wisdom and political strategy—as we commonly understand the terms."[4] How far this evaluation stands the test of objectivity is a matter to be studied in detail. We can just point out in passing that Gandhi combined in himself moral nobility with astute political realism. But to take up the thread where we had left it—Gandhi did not share the conventional notion of the dichotomy between individual and group morality. He had no faith in the dictum that political morality is at the most uncompromising antithesis to religious morality. For Gandhi, human society "is not divided into watertight compartments, called social, political and religious."[5] Human life being an undivided whole the relation between ethics and politics is that of action and reaction upon one another.[6] Moral virtues like truth, non-violence, etc., held no appeal for him if they could not be practised in practical and group life. To quote him : "Truth and non-violence are no cloistered virtues but applicable as much in the forum and the legislatures as in the market place."[7]

And, "Some friends have told me that truth and non-violence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation. Their introduction and application in everyday life has been my experiment all along."[8]

Further, "We have to make truth and non-violence, not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream. I shall live and die in trying to realize it. My faith helps me to discover new truths everyday. *Ahimsa* is the attribute of the soul, and therefore, to be practised by everybody in all the affairs of life. If it cannot be practised in all departments, it has no practical value."[9]

The excerpts given above are self-explanatory, and need no further elaboration. Now to pass on to consider, in brief outline, Gandhi's concept of morality.

Concept of morality

A few points need to be clarified before we start our discussion. Gandhi's frequent reference to spiritualization of political life and his statements like 'I am at heart a religious man' have lent the impression in certain quarters that his concept of politics was essentially religious which had very little in common with the secular notion of public affairs. Gandhi's use of religion so much disturbs Neibuhr that he has been led to say that it may have been plausible in India but it is ultimately unsound anywhere.[10] It is after all a matter of opinion whether Gandhi would get the ears of the people elsewhere. But there should be no misunderstanding that Gandhi's spirituality was nothing else than what he considered to be universal morality. True, Gandhi retained individual salvation—'seeing God face to face'—as the ultimate aim. But it remains, one feels, a matter of theory. As Spratt observes, "It appears to have little relation to the rest of his system : duties, service, must be performed for love of mankind in the ordinary, sensible way, while salvation is attached to them only by the thread of a dogma."[11]

Gandhi himself admitted that the desire for *mokṣa* was indeed there, but it was not meant for anyone than the individual himself.[12]

Religion, for Gandhi, was identifiable with ethics rather than with theology or metaphysics ; "except as ethical teaching", observes Prof. W. H. Morris-Jones, "it occupies in his thought the place of a preface to be hurriedly passed over."[13]

What did Gandhi mean by religion ? Let Gandhi himself explain : "It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated its true correspondence between the Maker and itself."[14]

His religion, he claimed, was not bound by 'geographical limits'.[16]

In *Ethical Religion* the relationship between religion and morality is more precisely spelt out : "There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness."[16] This emphasis on Truth and Righteousness as the supreme religion led him to affirm that there is no divorce between religion and morality. According to Gandhi, morality is the 'essence of religion'. "Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. True religion and true morality are inseparably bound up with each other."[17] Or, "Religion is synonymous with allegiance to the moral law."[18] He was categorical in his pronouncement that "As soon as we lose the moral basis, we cease to be religious. There is no such thing as religion overriding morality. Man for instance cannot be untruthful, cruel and incontinent and claim to have God on his side."[19] He would reject any religious doctrine "that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality."[20]

Religion and morality, according to Gandhi, are identical.[21] Gandhi saw that while religions might differ widely in their theologies, they were strikingly alike in their moral teachings. This ethical unity, however, is unfortunately overshadowed by their theological disunity, 'a disunity that does much to render ineffective their moral teachings'. Osborn notes : "And yet it is the humanist aspect of the great religions that have secured their survival and growth."[22] Gandhi stressed on this essentially moral 'humanist aspect' of the great religions. He believed that beneath all faiths there is a common ethical basis—a universal religion.* "It means", as he said, "a belief

* S. K. George called Gandhi's religion 'basic'. "Gandhi's religion is basic in three aspects. First, in the breadth and depth of its definition of ultimate Reality as Truth. Second, in its insistence that religion is all-pervasive and not a compartmental concern. And third, in its unreserved acceptance of the validity of all religions."—'Basic Religion : A Study in Gandhi's Religion' in *Gandhi Memorial Peace Number*, Ed., Kshitis Roy, The Visva-Bharati Quarterly, Santiniketan, 1949, p. 96.

Vincent Sheean defines Gandhi's religion as 'essential religion'. "...a powerful impetus toward essential religion, as distinct from ecclesiastical orthodoxies, is one clear result of the Mahatma's life struggle...By this I hope not to be understood as suggesting any Gandhian cult, creed or synthesis."—*Lead, Kindly Light*, Random House, New York, 1949, p. 253.

in the ordered moral government of the universe...This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality."[23] The "study of other religions besides one's own will give one a grasp of the rock-bottom unity of all religions and afford a glimpse also of the universal and absolute truth which lies beyond the 'dust of creeds and faiths'."[24]

Religion viewed as a moral influence leans heavily on a humanistic interpretation of ethics, observes Osborn.[25] If love of God is expressed as love of humanity, or if 'God is the helping of man by man', religion shares with humanism a common background in men's need for one another.

But religion usually makes exhortations to people to love one another, to refrain from acts which harm one another, without recognizing the compulsions of social conditions which frustrate men's natural tendencies to co-operation, which lead to what Niebuhr calls 'sentimental moralism'. (His strictures were aimed at liberal Christian thought during the world economic crisis of the 'thirties.) Gandhi's achievement was that his ethics recognized the social-institutional aspect and kept itself free from 'sentimental moralism'.

In *Ethical Religion*, Gandhi introduced the subject by a reference to the antagonism between riches and righteousness : the contemporary indifference to religion is due to the accumulation of wealth. The doctrines propounded in this book are the 'eternal' laws of morality which are found to be alike in all religions and are, therefore, binding on all. Morality, Gandhi held, is binding upon us, because it is the eternal and immutable law of nature. It is its own reward. The moral law is independent of our feelings and opinions, but it "has its seat in the soul of every man. Truth is within ourselves."[26]

The sense of shared humanity lies at the base of morality. Gandhi's emphasis on self-transcending service as the criterion and hall-mark of morality is free from any sectarian theological sentiment and contains a universal appeal. He wrote : "Our desires and motives may be divided into two

classes—selfish and unselfish. All selfish desires are immoral, while the desire to improve ourselves for the sake of doing good to others is truly moral....The highest moral law is that we should unremittingly work for the good of mankind."[27]

Gandhi's concept of morality breaks with conservatism: "True morality consists not in following the beaten track, but in finding out the true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it."[28] This note seems to be a re-echo of the *sant* tradition which was deeply rooted among the vast number of masses in India and ran parallel to the iron-framed orthodox tradition. Gandhi felt himself closer to the popular tradition.

Action to be moral, in Gandhi's opinion, must be voluntary. "No action which is not voluntary can be called moral. So long as we act like machines, there can be no question of morality. If we want to call an action moral, it should have been done consciously and as a matter of duty. ...Any action that is dictated by fear or by coercion of any kind ceases to be moral. It also follows that all good deeds that are prompted by hope of happiness in the next world cease to be moral."[29] This contains two essential principles that underlie Gandhi's concept of morality.

First, anything that denies the growth of human personality violates truth, and engenders violence and hence is immoral.

Secondly, service without any self-regarding motive is the essence of moral behaviour.

The effect of this emphasis on the ethical core of religion is very significant. As a logical step, religion becomes a personal quest and a way of life. Everyone should be free to choose his own religion. Gandhi wrote: "Religion is a very personal matter."[30] This is almost secularising religion—it becomes merely ethics—which even an atheist can find to be useful in the conduct of his life.

Truth

Ethical Religion incidentally affords an indication of the meaning of Truth. When not used in a metaphysical sense

it seems to mean the moral law, or set of laws. Truth as a duty will mean the duty to obey the moral law, the duty to do one's duty—'a tautology', Spratt calls it. The deduction is confirmed by his writings, in which Truth is made to cover very many principles.

When Spratt put this difficulty to Gandhi, he replied that it meant more than merely do what you believe to be right. It meant do what you believe, not what others believe, to be right. You must depend on your own judgement and conscience, and must develop them ; and you must be prepared to abide by the consequences of your own judgement, and if necessary suffer accordingly. "If this is a principal meaning of Truth", Spratt remarks, "the value which he attaches to that doctrine is easily understood." We agree with the learned reviewer that "It expresses his (Gandhi's) life's work of urging people to transform themselves, and more particularly his work of training himself to be fit for the task."[31]

We may recall here an interesting conversation that took place between Gandhi and Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose. Gandhi asked Prof. Bose if the scientist-professor did not at all believe in God. Prof. Bose confessed that the problem as to whether God existed or not, or as to what was the primal cause of the Universe, had never seriously come into his life. He did not concern himself with the question of such ultimates.

"Don't you believe in anything ?" he asked.

Prof. Bose said, "Yes, as a scientist, I do believe in truth. For, in the laboratory or in our scientific investigation, we undoubtedly try to discover the truth by observation and experiment. Unless we believe that there is something worth striving for, why should we engage in the chase at all. Truth may be like a carrot dangling before a donkey's nose, but it is there all the same."

Gandhi said : "That will do."[32]

The question of theological belief was not important. What was important for Gandhi was that one must be prepared to suffer for realizing the truth as one conceived it to be.

Ahiṃsā

Closely intertwined with the concept of Truth is *ahiṃsā*. According to Gandhi, "without *ahimsa* it is not possible to seek and find truth. *Ahimsa* and truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse ? Nevertheless, *ahimsa* is the means, Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question."[33]

Ends and means

The relationship between the end and the means is of crucial significance in Gandhian thought. "Means and ends are convertible terms in my philosophy of life", wrote Gandhi.[34] And, "They say 'Means are after all means'. I would say, 'means are after all everything'. As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and end."[35]

His belief in metaphysical idealism led him to pin his faith on idealism. "Indeed the Creator has given us control (and that too very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception."[36] Besides, the end grows out of the means. "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree ; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree."[37]

Gandhi extended this concept of the convertibility of ends and means to the sphere of socio-political matters. He wrote : "if one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."[38] To him, "the attempt made to win Swaraj is Swaraj itself."[39] All his efforts were concentrated on perfecting the means to attain the goal. Having once determined the goal, he never attached importance to its repetition. "The clearest possible

definition of the goal and its appreciation would fail to take us there, if we do not know and utilize the means of achieving it. I have, therefore, concerned myself principally with the conservation of the means and their progressive use."[40] His insistence on non-violent means to achieve freedom for the country should have to be understood in the background of his fundamental ethical belief. Gandhi's philosophy of action as expressed in *satyāgraha* can only be understood and appreciated in terms of ends-means relationship.[41]

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote : "Gandhi was never tired of talking about means and ends and of laying stress on the importance of the means. That is the essential difference, I think, between his approach and the normal approach which thinks in terms of ends only and because means are forgotten, the ends aimed at escape one."[42] This insistence on the supreme importance of the means distinguished Gandhian ethics, and logically his other theories about man, society etc., from what Nehru called 'the normal approach'. The Gandhian concept of the ends-means relationship distinguishes itself from the Marxian concept of the dialectical inseparability of means and ends. It may be pointed out here that Gandhi understood Marxism—he merely shared the perverted understanding—as advocating the dictum 'the end justifies the means'. He had on different occasions told that while he had a great regard for the Marxian ideal 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'—he called it the ethical ideal of non-possession—he differed from the Marxists on the question of the employment of means. We shall examine the implication of the respective points of view in our evaluation of the Gandhian ideal of the State where a contrast will be attempted in brief (see ch. 10 below).

'*One step enough for me*'

Gandhi's concentration on means followed logically from his fundamental faith. He wrote in 1920 : "For me I say with Cardinal Newman : 'I do not ask to see the distant scene ; one step enough for me'. The business is essentially religious. The business of every God-fearing man is to dissociate himself from

evil in total disregard of consequences. He must have faith in a good deed producing only a good result ; that in my opinion is the *Gita* doctrine of work without attachment. God does not permit him to foresee the future."[43]

Philosophically viewed, this concern for 'taking care of the present' leads to the pragmatic world-view. And pragmatism is not that far removed from philosophic idealism as is commonly supposed. Gandhi combined practical realism with philosophic idealism. He was fond of saying : 'I am a practical idealist.'

Gandhian ethics and Benthamite utilitarianism

Man's ultimate aim, according to Gandhi, is the realization of God. But he did not prefer the seclusion of solitude for individual salvation. It is through service to humanity that one should try to attain self-realization. Here the ethical note is pronounced. Self-realization to Gandhi means realization of 'the greatest good of all'. 'The greatest good of all' or *sarvodaya* includes social and political emancipation the absence of which impedes moral and spiritual regeneration.

Gandhi regarded himself as an ethical absolutist and quite logically, from his own point of view, rejected the Benthamite formula of the greatest good of the greatest number as imperfect and inadequate. In 1926 he wrote : "A votary of *ahimsa* cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula (of the greatest good of the greatest number). He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willing to die, so that the others may live. He will serve himself with the rest, by himself dying. The greatest good of all inevitably includes the good of the greatest number, and therefore, he and the utilitarian will converge in many points in their career but there does come a time when they must part company, and even work in opposite directions. The utilitarian to be logical will never sacrifice himself. The absolutist will even sacrifice himself."[44]

In Mahadev Desai's *Diary* (entry dated June 4, 1932) we find Gandhi's opinion about the said doctrine : "I do not believe in the doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. It means

in its nakedness that in order to achieve the supposed good of 51 per cent the interest of 49 per cent may be, or rather, should be sacrificed. It is a heartless doctrine and has done harm to humanity. The only real, dignified, human doctrine is the greatest good of all, and this can only be achieved by uttermost self-sacrifice."[45]

The utilitarian doctrine carried, in theory, to its extreme limit stands for 'democratic' tyranny—suppression of the minority by the majority—the professed aim being the good of 'the greatest number'.

Spratt observes in this connection : "the difference between 'the greatest number' and 'all' seems merely verbal ; and the principle (of non-violence) is not strictly absolutist, since it admits exceptions. It is in principle quite opposed to utilitarianism. But its practical outcome differs from utilitarianism only in the same sort of way as do the feelings of nearly all people. Few, I imagine, would be strictly utilitarian about deliberate torture, at least when inflicted upon humans. Mr. Gandhi feels in the same way about animals."[46]

It is common knowledge that popular usage has degraded the meaning of the term 'utilitarianism'. Utilitarianism has become identified with materialism in a hedonistic sense. A close student of utilitarianism comments : "One wonders how far Thomas Carlyle, with his vehement rhetoric, is responsible for this !"[47] It may be just a guess—for we are not sure—that Gandhi who read Carlyle might have formed his opinion form that source. Whatever be the case, in theory Gandhian *sarvodaya* and utilitarianism are opposed to each other though in pratical matters the distinction is too thin to be recognized.

The true source of rights is duty

Gandhi differed from the Benthamite concept of rights aud held that the true source of rights is duty. It was not only a question of personal moral norm with him, he held this doctrine to be applicable to the realm of public life also. We shall see subsequently how this moral maxim is embodied within the general framework of his political theory (see ch. 10, sec. on 'Rights' below).

Self-purification

As Gandhi did not believe in double standard between private and public life,* he always insisted that a *satyāgrahī* could not really reform others unless he reformed himself. Self-purification is the watchword for Gandhian morality. As he wrote in his *Autobiography* : "Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification." For him, "the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification."[48] Self-purification, in his opinion, enables one to attain *Svarāj*—the inner freedom. He conceived the relationship between inward freedom and Svarāj in political-economic sphere as integral. We shall attempt subsequently to see how he synthesized between the *Svarāj* of the individual and the Svarāj of a people (see ch. 10 below).

Cardinal virtues

Self-purification, according to Gandhi, involves the constant cultivation of cardinal ethical virtues like Truth, *Ahiṃsā* or Love, *Brahmacaryya* or Chastity, Control of the Palate, Non-Stealing, Non-possession or Poverty, Fearlessness, Removal of Untouchability, Bread Labour, Tolerance i.e., Equality of Religions, and *Svadeśī*. Gandhi while accepting the traditional virtues, as we have observed earlier (see p. 34 *supra*), refashioned them in keeping with the temper of the age and the demand of the situation. One may refer to *From Yeravda Mandir* for an elaboration of these virtues. The sociological significance of these virtues shall be dealt with at appropriate places. The twin concepts of *satya* and *ahiṃsā* shall be discussed in the chapter on *Satyāgraha* (ch. 9 below).

Nature of Gandhi's ethics : Spratt's view considered

A study of Gandhi's ethics leads us to consider certain questions. What is the nature of Gandhi's ethics ? To what

* "I think the political life must be an echo of our private life. There cannot be any divorce between the two."—*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras, Third Edition, 1922, p. 243. : Speech delivered by Gandhi at Bangalore, on unveiling a portrait of Gokhale in May 1915.

extent does it derive its origin from traditional Hindu ethics ? How much has Christianity influenced Gandhi's formulation of ethical norms and discipline ? Does it correspond to modern, bourgeois values ? Or, is it an expression of the values of society encumbered by medieval orthodoxy ? We hold these to be the moot questions that one must tackle for proper understanding and evaluation of Gandhi's ethics.

Gandhi held moral laws as 'immutable'. According to him, certain moral values are not conditioned by time and space. It was logical from his own standpoint of ethical idealism to view the moral problems thus. Besides his own fundamental faith in the immutability of moral laws, which was decisively of prime importance to him, another factor might have played its part in his insistence on observance of cardinal moral virtues. Such was his place that he had to make exhortations for cultivation of these virtues—and a past master in mass psychology, he might have felt that exhortations could only render themselves effective if made in absolute terms.

From the standpoint of social science, moral values cannot be said to be unrelated to the process of social evolution. Moral ideas are not something fixed ; they evolve in course of evolution of the society. They arise out of the human situation and in relation to the historical conditions of society. Moral ideas correspond to the given stage of social development. The material basis of the society conditions development of ethical concepts. General moral concepts like truth, honesty, good, right, justice and a host of others derive their concrete meaning from the actual material process of life. But moral ideas do not merely reflect conditions. They are also social forces which influence and affect the human situation. Secondly, there are permanent and durable elements of morality that belong to all forms of social organization—primitive, feudal, capitalist and socialist. Engels pointed out that feudal morality, bourgeois morality and proletarian morality have much in common because they represent three different stages of the same historical development.[49] Keeping this background in view, let us try to approach Gandhian ethics.

P. Spratt in his analytical study of Gandhism offers certain suggestions which merit close attention. His analysis, because of its off-the-track approach, may not commend itself for unanimous agreement. But that does not render his observations any the less significant. On the contrary, they provoke. Hence an attempt to follow his argument.

A brief note is to be added before we attempt an examination of Spratt's view. When Spratt, or any serious analyst for that matter, qualifies certain moral virtues as 'bourgeois' or 'medieval' its meaning should be understood in its sociological context, and not in any vulgar hedonistic sense as of representing the actual, sordid interests of any particular class. This note, one may rightly hold, is superfluous, if not definitely unwarranted. But this seems to be necessary in view of the confusion that exists in certain quarters.[50]

Spratt's views on the subject may be pieced together as follows :

1. Ethics is a 'product of independent and individualistic thought'. (p. 30)

2. 'India has not experienced on any great scale a change corresponding to the "bourgeois-democratic revolution" of Europe. Perhaps the greatest part of Mr. Gandhi's work has been promotion of this kind of change. His ethics can best be regarded as that of the insurgent bourgeois, striving to free himself from medieval encumbrances.' (pp. X-XI) 'His desire is to lift the people out of their medieval degradation'. (p. 32)

3. Gandhi's experience as a student in England and then in South Africa developed his admiration for the bourgeois ideal of character and conduct. (pp. 19-20)

4. 'His life has become a symbol of Truth, as he might himself express it. He is striving to make himself a perfect example of the individuality maintaining its own integrity against all temptations—the Will willing itself, as Hegel might have said...it is also the grafting of the self-assertion of bourgeois Europe upon the renunciation of medieval India.' (p. 127)

5. 'Hindu religious and ethical thought is pronouncedly subjectivist and introverted.' (p. 114) In spite of the teachings

of reformers from Buddha's time Hinduism is relatively lacking in ethical element. (p. 147) The virtue of active benevolence that Gandhi accepted wholeheartedly 'has always been characteristic of Christianity'. (p. 147) 'According to the theory of the most of the Hindu schools, morality is of only relative importance : it concerns existence in time, not eternity. It is commonly said that Christianity is a primarily ethical religion, as opposed to Hinduism, the chief interest of which is metaphysical. As on the similar question of knowledge and works, Mr. Gandhi's position is clearly nearer to the Christian.' (p. 151) 'Indian morality is formal and prescriptive.' (p. 149) In Gandhi's ethical ideas the modern, European element seems to be more pronounced. (pp. 140, 143, 147.) 'even in the matter of non-violence his attitude is one of freedom and protest against tradition and prescriptive morality.' (p. 149) In Gandhi's interpretation of the *Gītā* the inner aspect is not omitted, but 'he twists the whole teaching into a support of his own doctrine of practical service.' (p. 115) Gandhi follows the modern commentators influenced by European thought in making the central doctrine of the *Gītā* 'ethical, not spiritual.' (p. 143) 'No less clearly modern or Christian is the prominence which he gives to individual judgment of ethical truth, the conscience.' (p. 148) 'Deussen says that while Christianity sees the essence of man in will, Brahmanism sees it in knowledge. It is quite obvious with which view Mr. Gandhi would feel more sympathy. The whole of his teaching and example of initiative and energy in worldly business is an attempt to modernise India. His attitude to knowledge is equally ooposed to tradition.' (pp. 149-50)

'His insistence on useful labour, in the Ashram and generally, is a clear case. It comes directly from Tolstoy. His social teaching, with its democratic and equalitarian character, must be considered foreign to the practice, and to most of the theory, of Hinduism, though most reformers have preached similar doctrines. His humility may probably be regarded as owing something to Christianity. This feature is one of those which suggests that the influence has been specifically Christian rather than generally European :

in no other way could anybody learn humility from Europe'. (p. 150)

'His teaching may be regarded as inclining towards that type of ethical theory which makes the conception of duty predominant, as opposed to the type which lays stress upon virtue. Whatever may be said of practice, philosophical Hinduism generally has given more attention to the development of virtue than to the performance of duty.' (p. 151)

'His ethical system, with its consistent emphasis upon the development of individual character, is far better calculated to achieve its objects than Vivekananda's mere exhortation to an imitation of western energy. Vivekananda is out of sympathy with European thought, and he sees only its superficial success. Mr. Gandhi has in the nature of the case been able to understand its spirit far more thoroughly. Mr. Gandhi's way may after all prove to be the true way to the modernisation of India.' (p. 186)

Lest it be misunderstood we repeat that Spratt, while calling Gandhi 'a bourgeois thinker' (p. 186), makes very clear as to in what sense he uses the term. He makes it explicit when he says: "it is unsound to regard him as the agent of the wealthy classes..." (p. 244)

Spratt's analysis stresses two things: first, the virtues that Gandhi emphasized upon are individual, modern virtues, and secondly, his concept of morality is more Christian than Hindu in its inspiration. Spratt calls Gandhi 'a Christianised Hindu'. (p. 127 and pp. 166-7)

We have traced in Chapter 2 the impact of western influence on the origin and development of Gandhi's ideas. We have also seen there that Gandhi's passion for service owed much to the Christian influence. One may recall here that Gandhi called Gokhale "my Raja Guru".[51] Gokhale's motto was to 'spiritualise public life' and impart character to his countrymen. The liberal politician wanted to impregnate Indian public life with modern values which incidentally had their origin in the West. Gandhi, as has been observed earlier, promoted the process of modernization and helped in the

growth of modern values in a society that lingered in the twilight of medievalism. To quote Sri K. M. Munshi : "He (Gandhi) broke the iron grooves in which our society was cast."[52] This is true, notwithstanding his apparent conservatism. The moral values that he emphasized upon corresponded to the impulse of the given period of Indian history and his unerring insight enabled him to realize that a transformation of individual lives was necessary for doing anything meaningful and positive in social life. We shall see subsequently (ch. 10 below) the significance of Gandhi's emphasis upon individual regeneration as being the key to national emancipation.

Considered from the sociological point of view, the ethical norms that he wanted to introduce in public life were in essence modern and bourgeois virtues as distinct from the age-old medieval values prevalent in his days. Spratt's analysis on this score seems to be based on a correct appraisal of the problem.

As to the points that the Christian element was more pronounced in Gandhian ethics and that Hindu thought lacks in ethical content, these are matters of sharp controversy. How far Gandhi's concept of *ahiṃsā* was influenced by Christianity has been discussed in a previous chapter and no further discussion seems to be called for.

Albert Schweitzer remarks : "It is one of the most important of Gandhi's acts that he compels Indian ethics openly to come to grips with reality....So in one corner his world and life-affirmation is marked 'Made in England'."[53] Schweitzer's thesis that Indian thought characterized itself by its stress on world and life-negation has been subject to criticism from many quarters. But that is not important here. Only one point needs to be recorded for it seems to be relevant. We do not share Schweitzer's opinion *in toto*, for instances can be cited and authoritative texts quoted to disprove his thesis ; but on the whole, the main strand in Indian thought, we agree with him, has been centred round what he calls 'life-negation'. Gandhi, while remaining wedded to Indian metaphysical idea-

lism in theory, broke new ground by giving priority to ethical virtues. This speaks for his non-conformist attitude towards Hinduism.

Farquhar complained that "There is practically no ethical philosophy within the frontiers of Hindu thinking."[54]

Radhakrishnan contends this construction of Hindu ethics. Refuting the charge of indifference to ethics in Hindu thought, he says : "The charge, however, cannot be sustained. Attempts to fill the whole of life with the power of spirit are common. Next to the category of reality, that of dharma is the most important concept in Indian thought. So far as the actual ethical content is concerned, Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism are not inferior to others. Ethical perfection is the first step towards divine knowledge."[55]

It has sometimes been made out that European writers on Indian philosophy have wrongly interpreted Hindu ethics. But the thesis that Hindu thought lacks in ethical content finds its proponents even among Indian scholars.

Gaṅgānātha Jhā in a discussion regarding morality in Indian philosophy commented : "...instead of there being no room for morality in Indian Philosophy, there is a very strict discipline involved in the study and consummation of that Philosophy." He added to say that Indian philosophy gives only a "catalogue of virtues", but it does not mention the word "conscience".[56]

One may contend the learned reviewer's interpretation by pointing out that the *Yogavāśiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa* placed all its emphasis on conscience as the ultimate arbiter (see p. 40 n below for an excerpt from *Yogavāśiṣṭha* which was quoted in *Young India*). It may also be pointed out as a counter-argument to this proposition that while the *Yogavāśiṣṭha* duly emphasized the role of conscience and most emphatically enjoined one not to obey any injunction, however sacred it might have been supposed to be, that violated conscience, yet, withal, most of the schools of Indian traditional philosophy have not preached this doctrine for emulation. Rather, allegiance to authority has been definitively upheld as a positive virtue. It would be presumptuous on our part—since we lack the necessary professional training

in the academic discipline of Indian philosophy—to pronounce any authoritative judgement on this issue. Besides, it is very difficult to say the last word on Hindu philosophy which contains different schools of thought, often at variance with one another, within its fold. Only a point may be made out here without fear of contradiction that Indian philosophy is primarily metaphysical. Ethics comes here as the step towards comprehension of metaphysical reality or 'divine knowledge'. This is evident even from Radhakrishnan's statement quoted above. Morality itself has not been accorded the supreme position. Another point relates to the practice of Hinduism. That it has not helped in the growth of individual conscience as the supreme determinant of human action is common knowledge. We have seen earlier (Prof. Sushil Kumar Maitra's opinion cited above : see p. 21 *supra*) that Hindu morality primarily aims at the autonomy of the individual and that there is practically no recognition of the social duties proper, i.e., of the duties of social service in a positive sense. Gandhi, it is maintained, aimed at social service in a positive sense and there he broke with the conventional Hindu concept of morality.

Gandhi's interpretation of the *Gītā* was his own. The orthodox interpretation could not satisfy him for he wanted the *Gītā* to be the unfailing source of his philosophy of action. He was conscious of the fact that it might bear interpretation that his reading of the *Gītā* was coloured by the Sermon on the Mount. As he himself had told Vincent Sheean : "I must tell you that orthodox scholars have criticized my interpretation of the Gita as being unduly influenced by the Sermon on the Mount."[57]

Kant and Gandhi compared

Kant's 'categorical imperative' may be expressed precisely and completely in the form : 'So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only .' The great German idealistic philosopher found the nature of moral

behaviour in actions which conform to a universal law. But the universal law, he stressed, is derived from the notion of man as being a rational being. The test of the rightness of an act lies in the answer to the question: 'Could you, as a rational being, will that others do it?' And this is only to ask: 'Could you will that it be part of human conduct?' The universal moral law, Kant believed, is carried within himself by each rational being. It is that without which, he held, there neither would nor could be any ethics at all, for it is the unconditioned obligation ('the categorical imperative'), the 'Thou shalt', the demand that we do our duty, whatever the cost. His demand that we treat every man as an end, never merely as a means, is a plea that we strive to overcome the unsocial, irrational aspects which throw us into conflict with our fellows.

Gandhi's concept of universal morality is similar to the Kantian principles. His insistence on doing duty for the sake of duty, unperturbed by any anxiety for the result of actions "has an essential similarity", observes Dr. D. M. Datta, "to that of the great western philosopher Immanuel Kant who advocated the performance of duty for duty's sake without being moved by any thought of pleasurable consequences and with the faith that God sees that good deeds are ultimately followed by happiness."[58]

Spratt also draws a comparison between the two: "It is perhaps Kant more than any of the other eminent ethical theorists to whom one would look for a spirit similar to Mr. Gandhi's. There is some similarity in their ideas: Kant emphasised duty, held that the criterion of right and wrong is motive only, upheld a rather extreme doctrine of altruism, condemned mere adherence to tradition, and despised the goods which this world can provide; and so far Mr. Gandhi agrees. Even in these points there is to be seen something of the stern puritanical spirit which is so often found in his ethical writings. Christianity is said to stress God's love, Hinduism his [*sic*] justice. In this respect Mr. Gandhi usually remains a Hindu.

"...perhaps, he is trying to adhere to another Kantian principle, that his example should be universally followed. He often remarks that it is more important that the principle should be good than that people should always be able to act on it. 'We must set our standards right.' Often when ordinary considerations suggest that his principle is inapplicable he remarks : This is the test of our principle. He is perhaps referring to the need for rigid moral conventions by which the categorical imperative could be defended."[59]

Gandhi's contribution

Gandhian ethics, if studied in isolation from his life and his other social doctrines, may lend the impression that it is only another variant of abstract morality. But Gandhi avoided that much-too-common danger of ethical absolutism by relating his ethics to social life. He did not for a moment believe that moral virtues exist in a social vacuum. The concept of morality involves universality of application. But if society is divided into castes and sectional interests, between privileged and unprivileged members, the application of moral rules tends to be narrowed down into the projection of special interests. The social problem must be tackled at the proper level. Gandhi recognized that. For him, ethics was not divorced from justice. He added sociological content in his ethical principles. Therein lies his distinctive contribution.

7. Sociological Foundations

MODERN civilization has cast its pervasive influence on human life. Technological change, inseparable from and a part of the process of modern civilization itself, is not, as many seem to think, merely a means of increasing production and reducing costs. Besides the complex technical and economic problems it brings in its train, the whole scale of psychological and cultural values are affected by its 'onslaught'.[1]

We call ourselves civilized: What precisely do we mean by it? Definitions vary, for men differ in their approaches and there is no standardized philosophy of life.

The Oxford Dictionary defines civilization as 'an advanced stage in social development'.

In 1926 a book was published, *What is Civilization?* To it contributed such people of esteem as Maurice Maeterlinck, Dhan Gopal Mukherji, Dr. Du Bois, and Chi-Fiung Lu, and it carried an introduction by the famous historian of civilizations, Hendrik Van Loon. The publishers posed the question in their own introduction: Was civilization 'railroads, telegraphs, skyscrapers and open plumbing? Is it the conquest of the air and of disease? Is it literature and art, philosophy and religion, the superlative excellence of the few, or the greatest good of the greatest number?' "In this age of vast material progress" they added, "too many of us are prone to limit our definition of civilization by the very prejudices born of our own particular way of culture...to regard civilization in terms of our mechanistic achievements, and to look down pityingly from the altitude of our progress to the backwardness of other times and people."

In his introduction Van Loon declared against these material things. One could be a great scientist, he wrote, "and remain as uncivilized as baboon", and the thing called progress had "as little to do with civilized existence as a favourable trade balance or telegraph poles." For civilization, in his opinion, "is essentially a question of the inner spirit."

Answering the question for India, Dhan Gopal Mukherji reports a holy man sitting above the river at Benaras as saying : 'It is not enough to be prosperous and have every member of a community well-to-do. A community must produce its holy man if it wishes to gain the freedom of the city of God. Even in these degenerate days India has not failed at her central task. Behold, she has given birth to Gandhi.'

In India, Gandhi has been the most prominent of the thinkers and the leaders who gave serious consideration to the social and valuational aspects of modern civilization.

Gandhi on modern civilization

Gandhi did not consider modern civilization as true civilization. Modern civilization was 'Satanic' or a representation of the 'Black Age'. Much that passed in the name of civilization was no civilization at all. He considered civilization not in terms of quantitative and physical achievements but from the standpoint he considered to be religious or moral.

Hind Swaraj[2] or Indian Home Rule records the classic statement of Gandhi's views on modern civilization. One finds in this small pamphlet the quintessence of the social credo of of Gandhi. Though he advanced from his original position in his later days, as we shall duly note in course of our discussion (see also ch. 8, sec. 'Evolution of Views on Industrialism and Machinery'), yet he moved within the basic matrix of values as postulated in the book.

In *Hind Swaraj* he wrote : "The people of Europe today live in better built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly they wore skins and used spears as their weapons. Now, they wear long

trousers...and instead of spears they carry with them revolvers... Formerly in Europe, people ploughed their land mainly by manual labour. Now one man can plough a vast track by means of steam engines and can thus amass wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in waggons. Now, they fly through the air in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airship and reach any part of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button and they will have their clothing by their side....Everything will be done by machinery...now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now...they are obliged to work at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before....This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion....Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so.

"This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad....They keep their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. Women, who should be the queens of household, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories...."[3]

The civilization which did not take into account morality, had no appeal for Gandhi as it had no place in India.

Background

In a letter written from London on October 14, 1906, to H. S. L. Polak who was then in Madras, Gandhi expressed

his views on modern civilization, which were later incorporated in *Hind Swaraj*.[4] To quote from the letter :

"1. There is no impassable barrier between East and West.

"2. There is no such thing as western or European civilization, but there is a modern civilization which is purely material.

"3. The people of Europe, before they were touched by modern civilization, had much in common with the people of the East ; anyhow the people of India, and even today the Europeans who are not touched by modern civilization, are far better able to mix with the Indians than the offspring of that civilization.

"4. It is not the British people who are ruling India, but it is modern civilization, through its railways, telegraph, telephone, and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilization.

"5. Bombay, Calcutta, and the other chief cities of India are the real plague-spots.

"6. If British rule were replaced tomorrow by Indian rule based on modern methods, India would be no better, except that she would be able to retain some of the money that is drained away to England ; but then India would only become a second or fifth nation of Europe or America.

"7. East and West can really meet when the West has thrown overboard modern civilization, almost in its entirety. They can also seemingly meet when East has also adopted modern civilization, but that meeting would be an armed truce, even as it is between, say, Germany and England, both of which nations are living in the Hall of Death in order to avoid being devoured, the one by the other.

"8. It is impertinence for any man or any body of men to begin or to contemplate reform of the whole world. To attempt to do so by means of highly artificial and speedy locomotion, is to attempt the impossible.

"9. Increase of material comforts, it may be generally laid down, does not in any way whatsoever conduce to moral growth.

"10. Medical science is concentrated essence of black magic. Quackery is infinitely preferable to what passes for high medical skill as such.

"11. Hospitals are the instruments that the Devil has been using for his own purpose, in order to keep his hold on his kingdom. They perpetuate vice, misery and degradation and real slavery. I was entirely off the track when I considered that I should receive a medical training. It would be sinful for me in any way whatsoever to take part in the abominations that go in the hospitals. If there were no hospitals for venereal diseases, or even for consumptives, we should have less consumption, and less sexual vice amongst us.

"12. India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past fifty years or so. The railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors, and such like have all to go, and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live conscientiously and religiously and deliberately the simple life of a peasant knowing it to be a life giving true happiness.

"13. India should wear no machine-made clothing, whether it comes out of European mills or Indian mills.

"14. England can help India to do this, and then she will have justified her hold on India. There seems to be many in England today who think likewise.

"15. There was true wisdom in the sages of old having so regulated society as to limit the material conditions of the people : the rude plough of perhaps five thousand years ago is the plough of the husbandman today. Therein lies salvation. People live long under such conditions, in comparative peace much greater than Europe has enjoyed after having taken up modern activity, and I feel that every enlightened man, certainly every Englishman, may, if he chooses, learn this truth and act according to it."

During his stay in London (July 10 to November 13, 1909) in connexion with the Transvaal Indian deputation, Gandhi 'read much, pondered much' and discussed things with Indians of all shades of opinion, nationalists, constitutionalists and

terrorists, and with as many Englishmen as it was possible for him to meet. As he debated with them his views were taking shape. The conclusions he arrived at appeared to Gandhi to be final. And this sense of urgency impelled him to write the famous classic, *Hind Swaraj* during his return voyage to South Africa on board the s.s. *Kildonan Castle.*

Gandhi faced a world seized with the malady of violence and racial barbarism and inhuman exploitation. This ugly aspect of civilization repelled him. He was opposed to Western civilization not because it was western in origin, but because it struck at the roots of the values that India stood for—those which represented, for Gandhi at least, the basic human values.

Gandhi's moral and spiritual approach resulted in his bitter disillusionment with modern civilization as represented by the West. As one deeply influenced by the traditional values of Indian society he could not withstand the crude, vulgar materialistic and aggressive aspects of Western civilization. The mechanization and the consequent de-humanization of man —the chief symptoms of modern civilization—were revolting to such a sensitive soul as Gandhi. As a reaction against this horrifying aspect of industrial civilization he longed for the simple, pristine life. There he was in company with Rousseau and Tolstoy. He wanted to go back to agriculture and craft economy like Carlyle and Ruskin who wrote eloquent testimonies—in the moving and spirited language in which they were unsurpassed masters—to human sufferings that came ravagingly as a sequel to the industrial revolution in England.

Reasons for Gandhi's antipathy towards modern civilization

Very many causes have been suggested for Gandhi's antipathy towards modern civilization. These reasons may be summed up as follows :

1. renunciation of the material advantages conferred by modern industry gives a compensating moral or magic power to those who practise it.

2. the idea of the ethical and practical superiority of the non-violent method over the violent one which too he had associated with the East and the West respectively as early as 1896, might have taken some part in urging him towards asceticism, and was principally responsible for his opposition to industrialism.

3. the puritanical, independent strain in his mind might have led him the same way. Persons of this type, just as they would prefer to be independent of servants, even at the expense of much time and energy, would also prefer to be independent of machinery. Machinery is 'unnatural', they feel. Gandhi's remark that 'Men will not need the use of their hands and feet' in an industrialized society, or that '...where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered', or again, his stress on the 'natural' in food and medicine goes to show that he too felt it this way.

4. the Hindu conception of *Ṛta* is analogous to the belief held by the Greeks that interference with the course of nature is impious. (For Gandhi's conception of *Ṛta*, see ch. 3, p. 94 *supra*) This might have played a part in Gandhi's opposition to industrialism.

5. the matter of religion had its effect upon Gandhi. Many of the critics and suppporters of industrialism point out that it tends to weaken and destroy religious belief, and Gandhi must have been aware of it.[5] 'This civilization is irreligion', he said.

6. Gandhi's opposition to industrial civilization was partly the consequence of his 'empty mission' (Transvaal Deputation to London in 1909).[6]

Gandhi's feelings of unfriendly antagonism to Western civilization were confirmed by the hypocrisy, the insincerity, the politics of discrimination and persecution and even inhumanity of the ruling white group in South Africa. The rampant racialism in that country repelled the sensitive soul of Gandhi. That was the situational context of the *Hind Swaraj* which became the philosophical and sociological foundation of the *satyāgraha* movement from 1908 to 1914.[7]

Sources of influence

The reasons suggested above have, no doubt, some validity in so far as they help us understand the background of his mental development as also of his views on civilization systematically elucidated in *Hind Swaraj*.

How did Gandhi explain his own standpoint ? In the Preface to the Gujarati Edition of *Hind Swaraj* he wrote : "These views are mine, and yet not mine. They are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being. But, yet, they are not mine, because I lay no claim to originality. They have been formed after reading several books. That which I dimly felt received support from these books."[8]

Elsewhere he commented : "Whilst the views expressed in *Hind Swaraj* are held by me, I have but endeavoured humbly to follow Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson and other writers, besides the masters of Indian philosophy. Tolstoy has been one of my teachers for a number of years."[9]

As is well known, Tolstoy condemned the whole edifice of modern civilization built up by economics and science. In his cherished divine kingdom, there was no place for these things. In his words : "Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us, 'what shall we do and how shall we live'." In his severe condemnation of ecclesiasticism, Darwinism and contemporary science and art he urged a return to the simple innocence of the Gospels.

Ruskin's influence on Gandhi is too well known to be discussed here. (See ch. 8, sec. 'Ruskin's Influence on Gandhi'.)

Gandhi referred to Carpenter's *Civilization, Its Cause and Cure* in the text of the book (ch. 6).

Around the time that Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, he also wrote and published a Gujarati translation of Plato's *Defence and Death of Socrates* in the columns of *Indian Opinion* from 4.4.1908 to 9.5.1908.[10] Dr. Viswanath Prasad Varma writes : "...I have a strong feeling that in those days he might have been influenced by Plato's ideas and specially his criticism

against doctors and lawyers. Plato in his *Republic* had advocated that every man should be his own lawyer and doctor."[11] This 'feeling' is worth consideration.

'True Civilization'

We have addressed ourselves in the foregoing sections to an understanding of Gandhi's critique of modern civilization. Now to turn to what Gandhi called 'true civilization'.

How did Gandhi define 'true civilization' ? He defined civilization "as that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty."[12] Performance of duty and observance of morality were for Gandhi convertible terms. And morality was nothing but the attainment of mastery over mind and passions. If true civilization meant 'good conduct'* (he pointed out that the Gujarati equivalent of civilization meant 'good conduct'), India had "nothing to learn from anybody else, and this as it should be." He wrote : "I believe that the civilization India has evolved is not to be beaten in the world. Nothing can equal the seeds sown by our ancestors. Rome went, Greece shared the same fate ; the might of the Pharaohs was broken ; Japan has become westernized ; of China nothing can be said ; but India is still, somehow or other, sound at the foundation. The people of Europe learn their lessons from the writings of the men of Greece and Rome, which exist no longer in their former glory. In trying to learn from them, the Europeans imagine that they will avoid the mistakes of Greece and Rome. Such is their pitiable condition. In the midst of all this India remains immovable and that is her glory."[13]

Gandhi believed that the India of ancient times was an ideal representation of true civilization. This romantic attitude towards ancient Indian civilization is further evident from the following : "India has nothing to learn from anybody else, and

* cf. Rabindranath in his classic testament *Crisis in Civilization* (1941) where he says : "That phase of civilization with which we were familiar in this country has been called by Manu *sad*-âchâr (lit. proper conduct), that is, the conduct prescribed by the tradition of the race." (Visva-Bharati, Calcutta, 1961), pp. 11-12.

this is as it should be. We notice that the mind is a restless bird ; the more it gets the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich, or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition....It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre."[14] For the ancient Indians large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance where people would not be happy and where "there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and (that) poor men would be robbed by rich men."[15] They were satisfied with small villages ; for them 'the kings and their swords' were inferior to 'the sword of ethics' and the sovereigns of the earth were inferior to the Ṛṣis and the Fakirs.[16] The lawyers and doctors were there, but they were within bounds. They were considered people's dependants, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair and there was a life of independence for the common people.[17]

This India represented 'true civilization' to Gandhi—one which was supposedly based on God, and the purpose of which was to elevate moral being. West, on the other hand, was godless and immoral.

In his yearning for the resuscitation of the values of ancient India Gandhi was here found to be propagating the philosophy of Hundred Per Cent Indian.[18] Ancient Indian civilization, so it seemed to Gandhi, represented the climactic point in the history of mankind.

Political Ends & Cultural Means

As we have seen above in Gandhi's letter to Polak, his opposition to the West was not merely on the limited ground of political and economic subjection, but on the much wider issue of the conflict of civilizational values. But this does not mean that politics and culture were isolable categories for Gandhi.

Dr. Paul F. Power observes on this point : "Gandhi was vitally concerned with the politico-cultural relations of the East and the West. In several respects influenced by both civilizations, he was well qualified to distinguish between politics and culture. But he postulated their interdependency, as he did of all branches of life, and this prevented him from treating them as related although not necessarily interdependent. Thus he was certain that the West employed its cultural ideas and techniques to keep the East in colonial subjection ; and in turn he used cultural means to achieve his political ends."[19]

It is true that Gandhi associated modernism with the British rule in India. Prof. D. P. Mukerji in this connexion pointed out : "Strictly from the point of view of the propagation of an answering faith, this mixture of basic values with nationalism was excellent. A sociologist would not cavil at it. Technological values are usually associated with the nationalist values, particularly in the eastern countries in the period of their anti-imperialist struggle. It centres in their opposition to the obstacles that imperialism places in their economic growth, and also in the period of economic advance which is held to be possible only with the help of technology. But it is equally understandable that nationalist, anti-subjectionist motives and attitudes should be integrated with the basic values which are, or are interpreted to be, specific to the culture of the nation."[20]

It is from this point of view that Gandhi's views on modern civilization can be appreciated.

Evolution of Gandhi's views on civilization

Gandhi in his later days never indulged in a similar trenchant criticism of modern civilization. But it may be

maintained that even as late as 1938 he did not swerve from his original position. In a message to *Aryan Path*, Special Hind Swaraj Number, he wrote : "I have seen nothing to make me alter the views expounded in it." And selected extracts also may be culled out from his later writings and utterances to show that he adhered firmly to the basic tenets propounded in *Hind Swaraj*. While this estimation is valid in so far as his personal faith is concerned, in the larger sphere of public life we find him moving away from his earlier extremist position. His ideas since 1920 evolved well enough to permit limited acculturation and to accept 'the inevitable'. Whether he developed a keen awareness of history in the intervening period is a matter to be discussed separately. But the fact remains that he moved with the times and 'in accordance with the wishes of the people of India'. He was conscious of the fact that the people were not prepared to follow the decree of 'higher simplicity and renunciation' that was necessary for the attainment of 'true civilization' envisaged in *Hind Swaraj*. That was why he could say in 1921 : "I am not aiming at destroying railways or hospitals, though I would certainly welcome their natural destruction...they are a necessary evil. ...Nor am I aiming at a permanent destruction of law courts, much as I regard it as a 'consummation devoutly to be wished'. Still less am I trying to destroy all machinery and mills."[21]

A survey of the rise and development of modern Indian industries would reveal that in spite of the steady industrial expansion between 1890 and 1914, the level of Indian industrial development was low at this period. Progress was achieved primarily in the cotton and jute industries only. Heavy industries were absent. There was a number of reasons why the industrial development of India did not proceed at a greater pace. During the First World War, due to a considerable decline in the import of foreign goods, and also due to war requirements, industries developed further. Lord Hardinge's advocacy of 'a definite and self-conscious policy of improving the industrial capabilities of India' (1915), the appointment of the Industrial Commission in 1916 and the

declaration of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report for 'a forward policy in industrial development' and the recommendation of the Fiscal Commission in 1922 advising the government to inaugurate a policy of 'discriminating protection' which was implemented by the latter in 1923—all these factors helped in the process of industrialization at a relatively accelerated pace. The social significance of this development lies in the fact that industrialization became a national demand. And industrialization is not an isolable feature ; it is a part of the general process which includes railways, hospitals, etc., and other material amenities which strike at the root of the values of 'wantlessness' and all that it stands for.

Gandhi was realist enough to feel the atmosphere and concede his idealist position in favour of 'the inevitable'. That he moved away from his earlier anti-Western position to that of cultural pluralism* is clear from the extracts given below.

In 1920 he said : "It [the National University of Gujarat] does not propose merely to feed on, or repeat, the ancient culture. It rather hopes to build a new culture based on the traditions of the past and enriched by the experience of later times. It stands for the synthesis of the different cultures that have come to stay in India, that have influenced Indian life, and that, in their turn, have themselves been influenced by the spirit of the soil. This synthesis will naturally be of the Swadeshi type, where each culture is assured its legitimate place, and not of the American pattern, where one dominant culture absorbs the rest, and where the aim is not towards harmony, but towards an artificial and forced unity."[22]

Indeed, he came to accept some aspects of westernization, not as desirable in themselves, but as inevitable forces which might be transformed in their new setting.

In reply to Tagore, during their debate over the meaning of non-co-operation, Gandhi wrote : "I do not want my

* "His ideas resembles what Filmer S. C. Northrop has called 'culturism', the organization of the world for peaceful purposes by admitting deep differences among civilizations and also by acknowledging cultural complementarity"—Paul F. Power, *Gandhi On World Affairs*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1960, p. 134.

house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."[23]

In 1931 he wrote: "European civilization is no doubt suited for the Europeans but it will mean ruin for India, if we endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt and assimilate *whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us* as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it. ...Let us engrave in our hearts the motto of a Western philosopher, 'Plain living and high thinking'."[24] (emphasis added)

In 1936 he was categorical in asserting that "No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive."[25]

He was not a national-chauvinist to reject anything that might emanate from the West. He was against acting 'like a frog in the well'. In 1940 he wrote: "There is nothing to prevent me from profiting by the light that may come from the West. Only I must take care that I am not overpowered by the glamour of the West. I must not mistake the glamour for true light."[26]

This brief survey would suggest that there took place a transformation in his thought on civilization. Lest there be any misapprehension on this point, a note is to be added. This transformative evolution should not be taken to mean that he cut himself off from the roots or that he deviated from the ideals he cherished. It should not be construed to mean that in his later days he stood for dis-valuing the traditional Indian values. He was for assimilating in Indian culture what was best, no matter from whatever quarter it might come. One may read 'contradiction', or 'a policy of adjustment according to circumstances', or, again, his open-mindedness. But the patent fact of this evolution and its bearing can by no means be underrated.

The cardinal points

Gandhi's views on civilization, briefly outlined above, would suggest that Gandhi did not believe that "multiplication of

wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a step nearer its goal."[27] He was against 'the modern rush' and 'the mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction'.[28] This attitude is rooted in his firm faith in 'wantlessness',* as a desired human virtue. In his words : "Civilization, in the real sense of the term, consist not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants."[29] This is the real point of difference between Gandhi and most Westerners. It is clearly related to the divergence between the main Christian tradition and an important Hindu tradition concerning the satisfaction of desire.[30] This cardinal faith in 'wantlessness' or 'deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants' explains why he attached so much importance to simplicity as a criterion for civilization. Gandhi conceived simplicity to be the essence of civilization.[31] He was not prepared to barter away the ancient Indian simplicity for the 'tinsel splendour' of the West.[32] His insistence on simplicity as a value of life has been generally construed as that of advocating a throw-back to primitivism. But from Gandhi's point of view, "this is not to become primitive. It is only to take up a mode of existence that is instinctive to India."[33] He glorified voluntary poverty. He has been generally misunderstood on this point. He did not ask the masses suffering from grinding poverty to embrace poverty for its own sake. On the other hand, he tried in his own way to improve the living condition of the starving and ill-clad people of the country. *He was against enforced poverty of the*

* "The state of wantlessness is one in which there is no pain and consequently no possibility of getting pleasure···in the state of wantlessness there is happiness as distinguished from pleasure."—J. K. Mehta, *Studies in Advanced Economic Theory*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1957, p. 17.

"Wantlessness consists neither in not eating and drinking, nor in not earning income. All that is required is to do all such things with a selfless motive : to earn not for own use but for the use of all those whom our conscience would like to be served. Such a wantless attitude to life would secure, therefore, not only our own happiness but would enable us to contribute to social welfare. The welfare of an individual would be identified with that of society. Such an identity has been emphasised again and again in scriptures."—ibid., p. 20.

masses.[34] Voluntary poverty was for him an ideal to be pursued by those whose lives had been dedicated to a great cause—service to the nation or humanity as a whole. This was an extension of his faith in *aparigraha*, non-possession. His personal faith apart, this ideal of voluntary poverty or renunciation of want and possessions has its relevance to the domain of practical affairs too. While not subscribing to the philosophical creed of Gandhi, one may well appreciate the spirit of idealism (philosophic idealism is not meant here) that underlies this principle. Any significant movement for social reconstruction demands of its adherents idealism, and that too of a lofty standard. One has to pay a price for the idealism he cherishes. Sacrifice there must be, in some form or other, on the part of the participants in the movement and this is more applicable to the persons who are in the van of the movement. In order to build up an authentic mass movement, the leaders must behave in such a way as to appear before the masses at large that they are of the people and not merely for and/or by the people. That means that there must be some identification between the leaders and the people. Voluntary acceptance of poverty—which, because of its nature, is joyful—is a step towards such an identification with the masses of the people. Viewed from this point of view, Gandhi's espousal of voluntary poverty, besides its spiritual significance for whatever it was worth, had a sociological significance too. Gandhi, it is superflous to add, incarnated this ideal in his own person and identified himself with the people.

It may sound strange, nevertheless it is true that Gandhi stood for life-negation as well as for life-affirmation. In the Gandhian theory of civilization, one finds a synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal.

Criticism of the Gandhian theory of civilization

The Gandhian theory of civilization has been subject to criticism from many quarters. No detailed survey of these criticisms is necessary for our purpose, but a selective reference to these may be useful in forming a balanced opinion of his views.

Writing in Hind Swaraj Special Number of *Aryan Path* the famous ethicist C. Delisle Burns commented : "*Gandhi's first principle is that moral distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are of fundamental importance, as compared with more superficial distinctions between men in race, sex, religion or political opinion. No civilization is at all possible unless this is admitted.*"

But, "On the other hand, there are elements in the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi which are completely mistaken." "...from the point of view of a student of Western civilization", Burns added, "civilization does not consist of trains, tram-cars and hospitals. Nor are lawyers and doctors, whatever their excellences or defects, the chief representatives of Western civilization. ...To condemn Western civilization...because of the mechanisms which are taken to be its characteristic expression, is to misunderstand what is being opposed....There is, indeed, a danger that the teaching of Gandhi may lead back into the old mistake of village-pump politics, in which the distinction between good and evil is identified with the distinction between what is familiar and what is strange. If Gandhi's teaching is to have its highest value in its emphasis upon moral issues and opposition to the private pursuit of wealth and power, it must be freed from the confusion which arises when mechanisms are given the moral qualities which really belong to those who use or misuse them."[35]

The Christian Socialist John Middleton Murry observed : "I find it impossible to discern any essential difference between Gandhi's vision of real Swaraj and what I believe to be the authentic Christian vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. But there are distinctions. One is that Gandhi can, more easily than we, make his vision concrete by turning to the actual village-community which still survives in India ; whereas the Christian thinker has to turn to the village community of the European Middle Ages. And another more obvious distinction is that, whereas Gandhi has made up his mind that the technical 'civilization' of Europe is altogether evil and is to be wholly rejected, the European Christian thinker is compelled to ask

himself whether it is not absolutely necessary to preserve some basic elements of the mechanical technique...For although the machine—or power-production—has so disastrously become the master instead of the slave of European 'civilization', it does nevertheless offer an immense and universal liberation from human drudgery...*the ultimate social goal of the spiritual leader in the modern world should not be to withdraw backwards to the pre-machine community, but to advance forwards to the creation of a society capable of using the machine without incurring material and spiritual self-devastation*"[36]

The Fabian Socialist Prof. G. D. H. Cole wrote : "I do not believe that Western civilization is of sharp necessity at enmity with the human soul. I do not believe that science is man's curse, or that the world would be better without doctors or without machines. I do not believe that the peasant life is best, or that home-spun is to be preferred to machine-made, or that it would be better for men to sweep all their discoveries of the past two centuries aside, and go back to take up their lives again at a point, I know not where in history, before these things had become their masters. I make no judgement for Indians concerning the road they should travel ; for I am not competent to make any judgement. But for myself and the men and women I know I am not prepared to say that Western civilization is inherently false to the souls of men."[37]

The criticisms cited above have been made from the standpoint of Judeo-Christian traditional norms. We have observed above that there is a point of basic difference between the Hindu tradition which Gandhi inherited and the main Christian tradition. A better appreciation of Gandhi's views and their western criticisms can be made if we keep in view that difference of tradition and the approach that follows therefrom.

To add another point : while these critical appreciations were made in 1938, these reviewers did not take into account the later writings of Gandhi and concentrated their attention on *Hind Swaraj*.

Will Durant, referring to Gandhi's views on modern civilization, observed : "The outstanding feature of this philosophy, to

western mind, is its typical resemblance to the romanticism of Rousseau and the 'Young Germany' of Schlegel's days. There is the same resentment against 'civilization', cities and industries ; the same longings for old idealized medieval ways ; the same preference for the East as against the West, like the Slavophilism of Dostoiveski ; the same zealous nationalism and horror of foreign things ; the same enthusiasm for vernacular languages, the same revival of early literature ; the same call for freedom, based upon the belief in the natural goodness of men. And like every romantic rebel he enlarges his own cause to make it the cause of humanity ; through India he will liberate the world."[88]

It would be wrong to suppose that it was the western writers only who could not agree with Gandhi on this particular point. There was a strong section inside the nationalist movement itself which was pronouncedly opposed to the Gandhian theory of civilization. We need not refer to those controversies since they have no particular relevance to our study. But we would like to refer to one appreciative critique of Gandhian philosophy of civilization made from an academic platform. Dr. A. R. Wadia in his Presidential Address to the Indian Philosophical Congress (December, 1930) discussed 'The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi'. While paying his tributes to Gandhi, the learned professor made some critical observations on *Hind Swaraj*, a part of which is given below :

"Gandhiji's moral fervour and austerity evoke our deepest homage, but true morality must flourish not in the artificial atmosphere of studied simplicity, but in the busiest haunts of men. Genuine simplicity belongs to the heart, not to our mere physical environment. He has forgotten the long aeons that the spirit of man has taken to rise above its animal origin and create bit by bit that mighty fabric which we call civilization. Philosophy and ethics did not take their birth in the caves of the cavemen or in the huts of the savages. They awoke when man had conquered nature sufficiently to give him leisure to look around him and think....More than others a great *Karma-yogin* like Gandhiji should realize the full significance of *homo*

faber: man as tool-maker....If in the fullness of time man has invented machines. he has not sinned against nature, rather he has fulfilled it, for he has added to the fullness of life. Is he happy ?...One can be happy in abject poverty, unhappy in the midst of plenty. Mere happiness is no measure of man's advance....If science and machinery have killed, they have also saved ...And where did he [Gandhi] get the inspiration...if not from the 'cursed' civilization of the West ? If we in India have to make good our boast that the spirit of India is so broad as to harbour in its bosom varied cultures and varied creeds, we cannot bar the way to industrialism....If the industrialism of the West is really wicked and soulless, it will not do for India to turn her back upon it, but she must spiritualise it and this will be the test of her spirituality."[39]

This critique stands the test of reason in so far as it questions Gandhi's understanding, or rather the lack of it, of history, but the prescription for 'spiritualising' industrialism betrays an essentially philosophic idealistic approach in place of a concrete, sociological one.

Reflections on Gandhi's theory of civilization

We are living today in a climate of what Sorokin has called 'sensate culture'. Gandhi felt anguished at the spectacle of this soul-killing civilization. He expressed his indignation at what he considered to be immoral. Like Cicero, Kant and Fichte, Gandhi approached social and political problems from the moral point of view. He valued civilization in terms of moral progress. And that was why he could not but denounce the aggressive and materialistic West. Even before Spengler, Gandhi prophesied the decline of Western civilization but he was no pessimist to lose all faith in the rejuvenating power of the human spirit.

In his earlier writings, especially in *Hind Swaraj*, we find Gandhi to be a staunch protagonist of Indian culture and civilization. Objectively considered, this was somewhat in the general direction of the Indian revivalistic movement.[40] But Gandhi did not raise his voice of protest against the sickening

modern civilization as a matter of formal adherence to ancient Indian civilization, as was the case with many Indian revivalists ; it was much more than and qualitatively different from that. He suggested measures for material improvement without resorting to an imitation of Western civilization. He knew well enough that man does not live by bread alone, but he was equally conscious of the fact that man cannot live without bread too. The age-old spiritual and moral values of India had their deep impress on his mind but he was not that much of a spiritualist to deny the necessity of the basic human needs which demand their satisfaction in material life. This insight or this recognition of the practical[41] led him to suggest measures like the introduction of spinning wheel and other village crafts (for his views on the subject, see ch. 8, sec. 'Khadi' below) which, in addition to being economic devices, symbolized a particular way of life based on certain values which were fundamental for Gandhi. And thus he synthesized between the 'material' and the 'moral'.

As we have noted above, he moved away from his earlier position and recognized the forces at work. One may, on reading *Hind Swaraj*, legitimately question the unrealistic and unhistorical basis of his statement that the rejection of technological civilization in ancient India was due to a deliberate and conscious decision of our wise ancestors. This speaks of his indifference to the development of history, or his innocence about the processes of social evolution. His source of inspiration was the age-old Indian norms* and he saw in those values the final point of the development of human mind. He equated the prevalent value-system of India with what he considered to be fundamental and universal moral values. It did not occur to him that values are historically conditioned. He looked back certainly, but that was not in order to set up a replica of the past for its own charm. When he glorified the past, he did it only to stem the tide of 'the modern rush'. He employed the past, so to say, as a

* The seers of ancient India made a distinction between *preyas* and *śreyas*. (Kaṭhopaniṣad, Book II) *Śreyas* was the ideal Gandhi strove for.

countervailing measure to the onrush of what he called the 'Satanic' civilization. He might not have the understanding that history could not be reversed ; it could only be reconstructed. He might not also have shared the scientific socialist view that it is only in a society of plenty and abundance—possible only on the basis of higher labour productivity and under full social control—that man can regain his human nature and attain his spiritual development to establish universal brotherhood where the ideal of 'each for all' and 'all for each' will be the guiding principle of life.[42] But that in no way makes any the less significant the essentially humanistic essence of his opposition to modern civilization. M. de Jouvenal is right in pointing out : 'his was essentially a humanistic critique of industrial civilization.' One may find exaggeration in his criticism of modern civilization but that is all incidental in comparison to his fundamental objections. That the problem of civilization cannot be separated from ethics is a note that has its relevance even today when our social and political life rests on an amoral, if not blatantly immoral, basis. One cannot ignore the force of Gandhi's criticism of modern civilization. As an eminent Indian sociologist put it : "One may not like the manner of his posing the problem, one may consider it as partial, one may dismiss it, if one chooses, as many 'educated' men and industrialists have chosen. But his statements remain a challenge to the entire problem of technological change..."[43]

Gandhi might not have been able to outline the historically determined path for transcending what Veblen had called 'the predatory phase' of human development, but then there can be no doubt about the fact that he was the man who forged our consciousness about the necessity of effecting a thoroughgoing social change. In its animus, Gandhi's reaction to modern civilization was just, and therein lies its true significance.

The Social Philosophy

We shall now proceed to discuss some of the important Gandhian ideas affecting society as a whole. The importance

of a discussion of his social philosophy in this study lies in the fact that his social ideas were closely and integrally related to his political philosophy, as understood in its broad connotation. But his social views—on family, marriage, equality of women, caste and untouchability, prohibition, population, education, communal peace and amity—howsover important they might be, cannot be discussed here for obvious reasons. We shall confine ourselves to the problems of (a) caste and untouchability and (b) communal unity which appear to be more relevant to this study.

Caste and Untouchability

Gandhi, as we all know, conceived freedom in its totality. Political freedom and equality, however important, could not have been the end in itself for a man who wanted a sea-change in human relationships. He wanted political freedom as the first condition of the growth of Indian humanity, but he knew well enough that mere attainment of political power would not solve the basic maladies of social and economic inequality. That was why he outlined his philosophy of social integration which he believed as indicating the sure way of bringing about a new order of society. And for him, to believe was to act. He waged battles on all fronts, of course in his own way, to eradicate the evils that stood in the way of social regeneration.

India is a country of enormous variation and long survivals ; the institution of caste is one such survival. It is, so to say, 'the steel frame of Hinduism'. The Indian caste system is a big complex composed of various factors. We shall not undertake any sociological inquiry into the origin and existence of the caste system since it is beyond our scope and competence as well. Our primary aim in this study is to examine for ourselves the views held by Gandhi on the problems of caste and untouchability. A perusal of his views[44] would reveal that he did not cling to his old views when he found them to be inconsistent with ethics which he considered to be fundamental. That shows that his social ideas, like his ideas on economic and political matters, underwent a process of evolution. This

aspect needs to be stressed since his views regarding caste have created a lot of misunderstanding. His defence of the caste system in 1920[45] gave the impression—such was the impression even of such sympathetic reviewers like C. F. Andrews and Louis Fischer[46]—that he was conservative in this respect although he upheld radical principles in other matters.

Gandhi, as we have seen earlier, was profoundly influenced by Hindu philosophy, tradition and norms. He had an implicit faith in the basic kernels of Hinduism. Though he was a 'reformer through and through', his zeal for reform never led him "to the rejection of any of the essential things in Hinduism."[47] And *Varṇa* was one such essential thing to Gandhi.

The treatment of society as an organism is much the familiar in traditional Indian thought. The *varṇa* scheme of social organization lends itself to an organismic interpretation, for society is conceived of as a unit consisting of differentiated classes, each functioning in its specific sphere for the good of the entire society.* Gandhi understood Hinduism to be "a living organism liable to growth and decay".[48]

Gandhi upheld the principle of caste division of society so long as it was in conformity with *Varṇa-Dharma*, the original Indian conception of natural classes ; but he was opposed to the caste system as the institution when it had degenerated to a great extent, so that social stratification on the basis of caste had become the order of the day. In order to understand his point of view clearly it would be better if we classify his views on the subject under three headings : (*a*) his conception of *Varṇa* (*b*) Caste as *Varṇa* and (c) Caste in practice as distinguished from *Varṇa*.

* "Caste on its social side is a product of human organization and not a mystery of divine appointment. It is an attempt to regulate society with a view to actual differences and ideal unity. The first reference to it is in the Puruṣa Sūkta, where the different sections of society are regarded as the limbs of the great self. Human society is an organic whole, the parts of which are naturally dependent in such a way that each part in fulfilling its distinctive function conditions the fulfilment of function by the rest, and is in turn conditioned by the fulfilment of function by the rest. In this sense the whole is present in each part, while each part is indispensable to the whole."—S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1948. p. 107.

(*a*) *Varṇa*

"Varnashrama is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his *Varna* by choice. Not to abide by one's *Varna* is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four fold divisions are all-sufficing."[49]

"I regard *Varnashrama* as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original. Tnere is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that *varna* is based on birth. But I have also said that it is possible for a *shudra*, for instance, to become a *vaishya*. But in order to perform the duty of a *vaishya* he does not need the label of a *vaishya*. He who performs the duty of a *brahman* will easily become one in the next incarnation."[50]

In a speech dellvered at Trivandrum on 9.10.27, he explained *varṇa* in the following terms :

"So far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of *Varna* is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as the traditional is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the law of our being. ...You will realize that if all of us follow this law of *Varna* we would limit our material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and where through we can know God."[51]

Again, "*Varnashrama Dharma* defines man's mission on this earth. He is not born day after day to explore avenues for amassing riches and to explore different means of livelihood ; on the contrary man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker. It restricts him therefore, for the purpose of holding body and soul together, to the occupation of his forefathers. That and nothing more or nothing less is *Varnashrama Dharma*."[52]

Gandhi laid stress on functions being hereditary, because, in his opinion, heredity is a law of nature. But he was not for exclusive, watertight divisions. Though he believed that *varṇa* was closely related to birth, yet he did not subscribe to the view, as has been wrongly ascribed to him by Dr. G. S. Ghurye[53] that "one born a Brahmin always a Brahmin."

In his words : "Varna is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of Brahmana parents will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana. He will have fallen from Brahmanhood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as a Brahmana, though he will himself disclaim the label."[54]

(*b*) *Caste as Varṇa*

Gandhi extended his support to the ideal caste system, and not to its perversion. He equated the theory of caste with the law of *varṇa*. Gandhi held that the caste institution had its value when considered from economic, political and spiritual angles. Gandhi accepted the functional basis of caste and there he was in the company of eminent sociologists.

In 1921 he wrote : "From the economic point of view, its value was once very great. It ensured hereditary skill ; it limited competition. It was the best remedy against pauperism. And it had all the advantages of trade guilds. Although it did not foster adventure or invention there, it is not known to have come in the way either.

"Historically speaking, caste may be regarded as man's experiment or social adjustment in the laboratory of Indian society. If we can prove it to be a success, it can be offered to the world as a leaven and as the best remedy against hearteless competition and social disintegration born of avarice and greed."[55]

And, "The vast organization of caste answered not only the religious wants of community but it answered its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the

caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny of a nation that was capable of producing the caste system its wonderful power of organization."[56]

Gandhi defined his ideal social order in 1934 in the following terms :

"I believe that every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a observation of those limitations the law of *varna* was deduced. It establishes certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whilst recognizing limitations the law of *varna* admitted of no distinctions of high and low : on the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labours and on the other it prevented him from pressing upon his neighhour. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the implications of this law are fully understood and given effect to.

Q. Do you not think that in ancient India there was much difference in economic status and social privileges between the four *varnas* ?

A. That may be historically true. But misapplication or an imperfect understanding of the law must not lead to the ignoring of the law itself. By constant striving we have to enrich the inheritance left to us. This law determines the duties of man. Rights follow from a due performance of duties."[57]

(c) *Caste in practice as distinguished from Varṇa*

Gandhi considered the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. He felt that "the innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better."[58] In the same article he added that "there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse." But he became gradually convinced that caste as an institution was a travesty of *varṇa*

and emphatically declared : "Varna has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the name of *Varna*."[59] In the same strain he said : "*Varnashrama* of the *Shastras* is today non-existent in practice. The present caste system is the very antithesis of *varnashrama*. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better."[60] Though he called himself a *Sanātanī* Hindu, yet it was he who could assert : "Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is harmful both to spiritual and national growth."[61] In 1937, in reply to an American clergyman, he categorically stated : "Hinduism does not believe in caste."[62] In 1946, he stated that "caste is an anachronism."[63] These utterances suggest that he moved ahead of his earlier position of 1920* which created the impression that he was out-and-out conservative in social matters.

Interdining and intermarriage

That there took place an evolution of his views on caste is clearly evident from his utterances and writings on interdining and intermarriage. In 1921 he wrote : "I do not believe that interdining or even intermarriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges....

"Though therefore *varnashrama* is not affected by interdining and intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It undoubtedly is a religion of renunciation of the flesh so that the spirit may be set free. It is no part of a Hindu's duty to dine with his son. And by restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint....

* But it is to be noted here that in South Africa, even as early as 1909, Gandhi had publicly decried the caste system for its inequalities ; its 'hypocritical distinctions of high and low' and 'caste tyranny' which had made India 'turn (her) back on truth and embrace falsehood'.—'My Second Experience in Gaol [—V] in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, The Publications Division, Govt. of India, 1963, Vol. 9, pp. 180-1.

Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul. But this self-denial is no test of *varna*. A *brahmana* may remain a *brahmana* though he may dine with his *shudra* brother, if he has not left off his duty of service by knowledge. It follows from what I have said above, that restraint in matters of marriage and dining is not based upon notions of superiority. A Hindu who refuses to dine with another from a sense of superiority misrepresents his *dharma*."[64]

In a statement dated 4 November 1932 issued from Yeravda prison after his epic fast, he said : "Correspondents have asked whether interdining and intermarriage are a part of the movement against untouchability. In my opinion they are not. They touch the castemen equally with the outcastes. It is, therefore, not obligatory on an anti-untouchability worker to devote himself or herself to interdining and intermarriage reform. Personally, I am of opinion that this reform is coming sooner than we expect. Restriction on intercaste dining and intercaste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline, and was then meant perhaps to be a temporary protection against disintegration of Hindu society. Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth. Wherever, therefore, people voluntarily take part in functions where 'touchables' and 'untouchables', Hindus and non-Hindus are invited to join dinner parties, I welcome them as a healthy sign. But I should never dream of making this reform, however desirable in itself it may be, part of an all-India reform which has been long overdue.

"Untouchability in the form we all know it is a canker eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society. I think the distinction is fundamental. It would be unwise in a hurricane campaign to overweight and thus endanger the main issue. It may even amount to a breach of faith with the masses to call upon them

suddenly to view the removal of untouchability in a light different from what they have been taught to believe it to be. On the one hand, therefore, whilst interdining may go on where the public is itself ready for it, it should not be part of an India-wide campaign."[65]*

In 1933 he wrote : "Interdining and inter-caste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability."[66]

In 1935 he said : "In *Varnashrama* there was and there should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining.

"Though there is in *Varnashrama* no prohibition against intermarriage and interdining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of *Varnashrama* was observed there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own *varna*."[67]

He had been pursuing a vigorous but cautious approach in his campaign against untouchability. He held earlier that interdining and intermarriage were no part of the movement of untouchability (1932 statement quoted above). In 1942 he wrote that when he said that he had the general Hindu public in mind, not the Congress workers or Congressmen.[68]

In 1946 he moved further. In reply to a question whether the Congress programme for the abolition of untouchability included interdining and intermarriage with Harijans, he said : "So far as I know the Congress mind today there is no opposition to dining with Harijans. But speaking for myself, I have said that we have all to become Harijans today or we will not be able

* Regarding the above two passages and their apparent inconsistency, Gandhi wrote in answer to a correspondent's question :

"As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements especially if they are read in their full context. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead of 'prohibition', I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul'."—*Harijan*, 29.4.33, p. 2.

to purge ourselves completely of the taint of untouchability. I, therefore, tell all boys and girls who want to marry that they cannot be married at Sevagram Ashram unless one of the parties is a Harijan. I am convinced that there is no real difficulty in this. All that is needed is a change of outlook."[69]

And, "At one time I did say that interdining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further."[70]

Inter-religious marriage

In fact he went further. Gandhi advanced to the ideal of free inter-religious marriage. He held that there could be no bar to marriage between persons professing different religions.

"Q. You advocate inter-caste marriage. Do you also favour marriage between Indians professing different religions ? Should they declare themselves as belonging to no denomination, or can they continue their old religious practices and yet intermarry ? If so, what form should the marriage ceremony take ? Is it to be a purely civil function or a religious function ?

Do you consider religion to be exclusively a personal matter ?

A. Though Gandhiji admitted that he had not always held the view, he had come to the conclusion long ago that an inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. His stipulation was that such connection was not a product of lust. In his opinion it was no marriage. It was illicit intercourse. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the other. There was no question in this of conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony would be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. This happy event could take place when the communities shed mutual enmity and had regard for the religions of the world."[71]

"Q. You say that you are in favour of inter-religious marriages but at the same time you say that each party should retain his or her own religion and, therefore, you said, you tolerated even civil marriages. Are there any instances of parties belonging to different religions keeping up their own religions to the end of

their lives ? And is not the institution of civil marriage a negation and does it not tend towards laxity of religion ?

A. Gandhiji said that the questions were appropriate. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths upto death, because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. But he would go so far as to say that they need not wait for discovery of past instances. They should create new ones so that the timid ones may shed their timidity.

As to civil marriages, he did not believe in them, but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much-needed reform for the sake of reform."[72]

That this was indeed an advance becomes clearly evident when his earlier position of 1920 is considered side by side.

In an article in *Young India* (25.2.1920) entitled 'Hindu-Mahomedan Unity' he wrote : "In my opinion, the idea that interdining or intermarrying is necessary for national growth, is a superstition borrowed from the West."

"I hold it to be utterly impossible for Hindu and Mohamedans to intermarry and yet retain in tact each other's religion. And the true beauty of Hindu-Mahomedan Unity lies in each remaining true to his own religion and yet being true to each other."[73]

Untouchability

Untouchability is an inhuman institution in Hindu society. Hallowed with tradition and sanctified by religion, it continued to exist in all its oppressive facets for centuries. History has known hierarchically graded societies of various types in different epochs and among different peoples. All these societies were based on social privileges and inequalities. However, no hierarchically graded society can compare with the Hindu society in its extreme gradation of ranks and inequalities of rights. Hardly any society condemned a section of it to physical segregation as the Hindu society did in the

case of the untouchables.[74] The mere touch of an untouchable was a sin. In some parts of India, especially in the South, not only untouchability was practised on a vast scale, but unapproachability and invisibility too.

Gandhi's sensitive soul rebelled against this outrage of human personality and human dignity. His campaigns against untouchability are too well known to be recounted here. He identified himself with the untouchables, calling himself a *Harijan*.* It was his deep concern for the depressed humanity that guided him to launch his nation-wide reform movement. This feeling for the down-and-out masses was more or less instinctive with him. In his words :

"I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Uka, an 'untouchable', used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

"While at school I would often happen to touch the 'untouchables', and as I never would conceal the fact

* The empoyment of the term 'Harijan' offers a good example of Gandhi's symbolic language. Hindu social reformers referred to untouchables usually in terms of 'pariah' or the victims of 'don't touchism'. For years, Gandhi himself used 'bhāṅgī', 'untouchable', 'unapproachable', '*Pañcama*', or 'Antyaja' (the last born). Then, in August 1931, he wrote that at last he had found the right word : 'Harijan'. "It was a word", he told us, "used by the great saint, Narasinha Mehta", a Nagar Brāhmana "who defied the whole community by claiming the 'untouchable' as his own." "I am delighted to adopt the word", he continued, "which is sanctified by having been used by such a great saint, but it has for me a deeper meaning thou you may imagine. The 'untouchable', to me, is, compared to us, really a 'Harijan'—a man of God, and we are *Durjan*, men of evil."—*Young India*, 6. 8. 1931, in *The Removal of Untouchability*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1954, p. 14.

from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching a Musalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so, but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation.

"The Ramayana used to be regularly read in our family. 'How can the Ramayana', I thought to myself, 'in which one who is regarded nowadays as an 'untouchable' took Rama across the *Ganga* in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being 'untouchables' on the ground that they were polluted souls ?' The fact that we addressed God as the 'purifier of the polluted' and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard any one born in Hinduism as polluted or 'untouchable'—that it is Satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing had crystallized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin."[75]

This long extract is given only to show that it was not with any ulterior political purpose or any other end in view that he had organized the movement. The aim of the anti-untouchability campaign was primarily and essentially humanitarian. But this does not mean that the problem of emancipation of about one-fifth of the total Hindu population (1931 census) was less important in any scheme of national freedom and social reconstruction in India. Indeed, how could the freedom movement at all march forward keeping such a vast mass of the toiling people beyond the pale of society ?* In that sense it had a bearing on the political movement, though not in any narrow sense.

* "Swaraj is a meaningless term, if we desire to keep a fifth of India under perpetual subjection, and deliberately deny to them the fruits of national culture. We are seeking the aid of God in this great purifying movement, but we deny to the most deserving among His creatures the rights of humanity. Inhuman ourselves, we may not plead before the Throne for deliverance from the inhumanity of others."—*Young India*, 25.5.21, p. 165.

Untouchability, he maintained, was no part of Hinduism. He wrote : "Untouchability is not only not a part and parcel of Hinduism, but a plague, which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat."[76] In a speech in 1925 he cried out in agony : "If this is Hinduism, O Lord, my fervent prayer is that the soonest it is destroyed, the best."[77]

The feeling of identification with the suppressed humanity was so deep as to evoke the following statement :

"I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share thir sorrows, sufferings, and affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, pray that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* or *shudra*, but as an *ati-shudra*."[78]

Gandhi put the entire responsibility for the 'cancer of untouchability' on the caste-Hindus. He said categorically : "Let me tell you that it is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is really, and in law, an active participator in it. You must therefore begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines."[79] He was of the opinion that the caste-Hindu owed a sacred duty to the so-called untouchables. He must become a *bhāṅgī* (sweeper) in name and action. When that happened the untouchables would rise at a bound and Hinduism would leave a rich legacy to the world.[80]

But it was not merely a Hindu social reform movement for Gandhi. He ascribed a wider meaning to the movement against 'the monster of untouchability'. "My own innermost desire is not that the brotherhood of Hindus only may be achieved, but it essentially is that the brotherhood of man—be he Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Parsi or Jew—may be realized."[81] He yearned for one human family to grow. In his words : "The ulcer of untouchability has gone so deep down that it seems to pervade our life. Hence the unreal differences : Brahmana and Non-Brahmana, provinces and

provinces, religion and religion. Why should there be all this poison smelling of untouchability ? Why should we not all be children of one Indian family and, further, of one human family ? Are we not like branches of the same tree ?

"When untouchability is rooted out, these distinctions will vanish and no one will consider himself superior to any other. Naturally, exploitation too will cease and co-operation will be the order af the day."[82]

The outline-survey given above indicates three salient features : (a) Gandhi's allegiance to *Varṇa* as the fundamental law of life governing the human family, (b) his belief that caste as it was practised was an anachronism for the present society—here we find a marked advance from his earlier views, and (c) his passion against the evil of untouchability.

A brief survey of opinions

Gandhi's advocacy of the *Varṇa* system has been much criticized. Dr. Ambedkar, after branding Gandhi as 'a social reactionary', said : "Mr. Gandhi may be taken to be not in favour of caste. But Mr. Gandhi does not say that he is against the *Varna* system. And what is Mr. Gandhi's *Varna* system ? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system."[83]

Dr. G. S. Ghurye has understood Gandhi to be advocating a throwback to the past : "There were those who believed that the best way to bring about the desired end was to hark back to the imagined pure state of Hindu society which was characterized by the existence of only the four traditional castes, viz. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. The greatest exponent of this point of view was Mahatma Gandhi...

"Altogether it appears to me that a return to the fourfold division of society is impracticable, and even if accomplished would serve no more useful purpose than that of reminding us of our past heritage."[84]

In S. Natarajan's estimate : "Gandhi's entry into the social reform field was a somewhat ambiguous one ; and his insistence that he had differences with 'orthodox' reformers was more

than justified. The vehement language in which he denounced the observance of untouchability, roused a certain resistance in the orthodox, specially in Bombay city.....But elsewhere his repudiation of interdining and his acceptance of the caste won over the orthodox. Moreover, his repeated insistence that the caste Hindus should be persuaded, was a flattering approach to reactionaries—particularly while they did not realize what forms Gandhian persuasion could take."[85]

According to Charles H. Heimsath : "The social reformers had to reject Gandhi's position—to give up caste and retain the four varnas—just as they had rejected the identical position taken by Dayananda Saraswati.....The reformers realised that nothing practical would be gained if Hindus were to re-classify themselves into varnas, and in any case it would be impossible to give real effect to such a procedure."[86]

Prof. Oliver Cromwell Cox maintains "that Gandhi himself who knows the Christian Gospels well is still unable to rise far beyond the principles of impurity and its logical extreme, untouchability....The Mahatma would probably do the impossible : remove untouchability but otherwise maintain the caste system in tact."[87]

Dr. T. K. N. Unnithan says : "Without attacking the principle that created the structure of the caste system, he considered it practical to eliminate its vices by the reformation of the individual. If all members of the society did not observe the obsolete caste regulations or untouchability, the system would automatically cease to function. The improbability of of this occurring in reality is obvious. This is the difficulty that confronts us with most of the Gandhian propositions. Perhaps it was the only course open to him in view of his advocacy of the principle of non-violence as the law that should govern all practical attempts at reformation. Because if he attacked the theory as such, it would have probably created a sudden break in orthodox social tendencies which in turn might have culminated in disharmony, violence and upheavals. It is to prevent this and to effect a more harmonious

and non-violent change that he naturally had to resort to this method."[88]

Dennis Dalton notes : "Above all, Gandhi sought, in so far as it was possible for a moral reformer in India, to promote social harmony and not to provoke abrupt change with violent consequences....there is little novelty in Gandhi's position on caste. Except, that is, for the element of style ...The admixture of continuity and innovation...always characterized his style...."[89]

Louis Renou, the famous Indologist, has mentioned in this connexion : "His [Gandhi's] social ideal was not so much to abolish caste as to offset its effects, while maintaining (at least for the present) the framework of the four great social divisions going back to the remotest past. This is the teaching of the Buddha himself, of the sages and thinkers of ancient or medieval India, and it is the impression derived from Sanskrit literature, which, taken as a whole, ignores the 'caste' (jati) and recognizes only the class (Varna)."[90]

Dr. Viswanath Prasad Varma observes : "The defence of the varnashrama is not a conservative apology for traditional social system. ...Gandhi was a reformer through and through but he did not like to give a rough handling to social patterns for the sheer delight of novelty and social experimentation.... It appears that with the passage of time Gandhi's historicist conservatism slightly yielded place to some kind of radical social equalitarianism."[91]

Dr. Joan V. Bondurant holds : "The revolutionary character of the Gandhian approach may be seen...in his opinion on the orthodox rules governing interdining. ...Gandhi himself promoted many marriages across caste lines and his ashram society was organised entirely without caste distinction. ...The continuing campaign Gandhi conducted against untouchability is, again, telling evidence of his abiding concern for the reconstruction of the institutions and approaches of his own society. ...Gandhi pressed his campaign to overcome discrimination and the fear and weaknesses which arise from it. In so doing he undermined some of the most sacred institutions of his society."[92]

Gunnar Myrdal in his *Asian Drama* points out : "When it came to the social aspects of caste and the status of women, Gandhi was an uncompromising radical leveller and never more so than in his later years. Throughout his life Gandhi was adamant in his condemnation of untouchability. It is true that in preaching an all-embracing, tolerant syncretism he sought to defend a purified and functional caste system as a means of social organization. But he was opposed to the caste system as it existed in India."[93]

Reflections on Gandhi's views

In our opinion Gandhi's advocacy of *Varṇa Dharma* was primarily guided by his attachment to the *Gītā*. The *Gītā* stands for an organic, as distinct from an atomistic, conception of society.[94] The *Gītā* insists on each order performing its own specific duties which constitute its *dharma* : "Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well-performed ; better is death in the discharge of one's duties : another's duty is fraught with danger."[95] Gandhi had the following comments to offer on the stanza quoted above : "One man's duty may be to serve the community by working as a sweeper, another's may be to work as an accountant. An accountant's work may be more inviting, but that need not draw the sweeper away from his work. Should he allow himself to be drawn away he would himself be lost and put the community into danger. Before God the work of man will be judged by the spirit in which it is done, not by the nature of the work which makes no difference whatsoever. Whoever acts in a spirit of dedication fits himself for salvation."[96] It may be noted here that the *Gītā* rationalized the traditional division of labour and invested it with spiritual significance. In the *Gītā* we read that the four-fold division of *varṇa* was based on differences of *karma* and *guṇa*. Gandhi while upholding *varṇa* laid stress on these aspects. He accepted the teachings of the *Gītā* to be fundamental, universal and proclaiming the ultimate truth and he saw in the restoration of the true *varṇāśramadharma* the path of salvation. He did not care to find out that the

philosophy of the *Gītā* was evolved at a particular period of Indian history and that like all philosophies the *Gītā* too represented a particular mode of approach corresponding to the material development of the then society.[97] This indifference to time, a characteristic of the Hindu mind, resulted in his unhistorical faith that *varṇa* was the ideal scheme of social organization for all times.

He understood *varṇa dharma* as representing the natural order of society. And the natural was the perfect for him. It may be presumed that his urge for the natural, the perfect and the simple led him to advocate *varṇāśramadharma* as the sure way of getting out of the monstrous division of society based on innumerable castes and sub-castes.

But it was not merely the basic religious faith that was responsible for his holding such a view ; it was much more. If we read his views on *varṇa* and caste carefully we may be able to discern some sociological concepts involved in this theory. The organismic conception of society is conceived in terms of differentiation and integration. Gandhi, it seems, understood the four-fold division of society in that light. *Varṇa*, or the original caste order of society, it is claimed, was evolved for maintaining social equilibrium. That Gandhi understood the caste institution in that perspective and not in terms of social distance is evident from his writings. He categorically said : "I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of Advaita and my interpretation of Advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever."[98] His faith in the oneness of humanity[99] impelled him to move for the obliteration of the caste system that perpetuated social distance.

That he was against social distance among the different castes would be evident if we refer to his insistence on bread labour as a fundamental law of our being, a law common to all the *varnas*.[100]* In his opinion, "a Brahman is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahman who refused to

* For his views on bread labour, see ch. 8, sec. 'Bread Labour'.

labour will be voted down as an idiot."[101] The introduction of the concept of bread labour in a hierarchical, authoritarian society was of great import in that it undermined the very basis of social distance institutionalized through the caste system.

In our study of the evolution of his views on interdining and intermarriage we have seen how he progressed from his somewhat closed outlook to a broad, liberal view of things. Restrictions regarding dining and endogamy are the formidable pillars which sustain the caste structure. And advocacy of interdining and intermarriage, even inter-religious marriage, in authoritarian Hindu society certainly speaks of a freshness and vigour of mind.

One can find traces of conservatism in his earlier views, but his later writings dispel that misgiving. His basic allegiance to *varṇa* may be construed as a plea for perpetuating the caste system by 'a new name', as has indeed been held by Dr. Ambedkar and others. But this construction seems to suffer from a subjective approach. It would be more logical to hold that Gandhi pursued a slow but steady approach for the removal of caste distinctions. That was his technique of movement—which fitted in well with his reliance on the individual. He believed that reforms could only begin with individuals. His practical sense might have dictated him to prepare the ground first and then strike at the root. As was his wont, "he seized upon the traditional only to transform it."[102] Gandhi's views may be better appreciated from such a standpoint.

Gandhi passionately struggled for the liquidation of untouchability. He endeavoured to awaken the conscience of the upper caste Hindus against this infamy of ages.

What was the significance of this movement ? We would like to share the view of Prof. N. K. Bose who holds : "Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan movement did succeed in focussing the attention of the public on the wrongs suffered by the suppressed classes under Hinduism. It has succeeded in bringing about a psychological transformation in the attitude of the two classes (touchables and untouchables) towards one another."[103]

To sum up, the problems of caste and untouchability are related to the material basis of social organization. Abolition of caste and untouchablility demands a basic socio-economic reconstruction. [104] One may hold that Gandhi's social ideas had not provided that philosophy of revolutionary change—but that is a matter of of opinion. One may not also like the manner of his posing the problem. Still there can be no two opinions as to the fact that Gandhi's views largely influenced and accelerated the pace of the social reform movement. An objective appraisal suggests that the anti-untouchability movement served the purpose of awakening the conscience of the nation against this evil. And that was no mean achievement considering the period when Gandhi launched his crusade against this 'human sin'. This movement was the expression and growth of the larger national and human consciousness of the Indian people. On the one hand, the national movement contributed, though slowly, towards the dissolution of caste distinctions. And on the other, the anti-untouchability movement, in its turn, contributed towards the building up of the Indian people on a democratic basis.[105] Gandhi's social philosophy was vaild in so far as it could create a climate of democratic consciousness. And who can deny that consciousness is the propelling factor of social action ? Democratic consciousness, slowly but surely, saps the foundations of anachronistic social institutions and social inequality.

Gandhi's Ideals of Communal Unity

The communal question was one of the outstanding problems of the Indian nationalist movement. Even today few questions in this country arouse such intense passion and controversy as the question of relationship between its two major communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. Communalism had as its cause varied and intricate factors—political, economic, religious, psychological and so on But it was mainly the result of the peculiar development of the Indian social economy under the British rule, of the uneven economic and cultural development of different communities, and of the action of the strategy of

both the British government and the vested interests within those communities.[106]*

Communalism in India may be defined "as that ideology which emphasizes as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups ; the words 'adherent' and 'religion' being taken in the most literal sense."[107]

In imposing its categories of thought upon its victims, it aimed at exterminating all other sociological and political categories. In raising and making supreme the communal issue, it confused, if it did not suppress, every other issue—political, social economic, and even religious.[108]

A survey of the political history of India during British rule, more particularly of this century, would reveal how the contagion of communalism perverted the social content of the anti-imperialist people's movement and frustrated the genuine aspirations and logical culmination of the nationalist struggle. But it is not our purpose to relate that story here. We shall confine ourselves to a discussion, however brief, of Gandhi's ideals of communal harmony.

Hindu-Muslim unity was a part of his very being. It was the breath of his life. Gandhi was from his early youth a votary of amity between people of different denominations. It was rather at an early stage of his public life in South Africa that Gandhi felt the necessity of communal unity. Throughout his public life of fifty odd years he symbolized in himself the message of brotherhood among communities. As the "generalissimo" of the nation, as Mahomed Ali called him from the presidential chair of the Indian National Congress at Coconada (1923), he naturally

* cf. "...the Hindus, Muslims and the British goverments constitute the three arms of the communal triangle. From other considerations also, the question assumes a triangular shape. The political arm of the triangle is generally the best known, since it is the most obvious. But complex problems do not always admit of simple and cut-and-dry explanations. While the political aspect has an importance all its own, it is by no means the only aspect of the communal problem. There are other forces whose influence must be adequately appraised. One such is the sociological basis of the communal problem. The other is the irrational factor..." —Asoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India*, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1942, pp. 7-8.

looked at the political aspect of the problem. But he was no ordinary politican in the usually understood sense of the term. The question of communal peace had a broader appeal for him. He believed in the fundamental unity of all religions. In his words : "I write in the name and for the sake of heart-unity which I want to see established among the people of this land professing different faiths. In nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exceptions to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity."[109] He preached equal regard for all religions throughout his life. "The key to the solution of the tangle lies in everyone following the best in his own religion and entertaining equal regard for the other religions and their followers."[110]

Another basic point in his approach to the communal problem was that he pleaded for generosity on the part of the majority community. "It would be a great thing for the Hindus to achieve this act of self-denial."[111]

But it was no naive faith in fundamental unity of all religions that impelled him to dedicate his life for the preservation of communial unity. He had a strong political sense to understand that the foreign rulers had been pursuing the policy of divide-and-rule to keep going their administration and exploitation. "My case is that alien rulers India have ruled India on the principle of divide and rule. No alien imperial rule could go on in India unless the rulers coquetted now with the one and then with the other party. We will continue to be divided so long as the wedge of the foreign rule remains there and sink deeper and deeper. That is the way of the wedge. But take out the wedge and the split parts will instantly come together and unite..."[112]

Though it can be said quite legitimately that his plea for communal unity was advocacy rather than analysis, yet that should not lead to the conclusion that he was absolutely unconversant with the sociological basis of the problem. The following will suggest that he could at least perceive, if not

actually comprehend, the genetic cause of communal conflict.

"Q. The majority of the Socialists claim that if there was a socialist revolution the economic question will come to the forefront throwing the communal conflict in the background. Do you agree ?

A. The economic conflict...is likely to make the Hindu-Muslim tension less acute."[113]

Gandhi all along contested the theory that the Muslims in India were a separate nation. He denied the religious basis of nationhood.[114] He was opposed to the vivisection or any partition of the country on communal basis. In his words : "The 'two-nation' theory is an untruth."[115] But the tragic reality took place despite Gandhi's pronounced opinion on the subject. It is a grim saga written in the blood of the lakhs of our countrymen. It is for the historians to trace the development of that fateful event. The fact of the partition notwithstanding, Gandhi tried to hold the citadel alone and he ploughed a lonely furrow for restoring communal peace in both the parts of this sub-continent. That story of lofty nobleness is a memory to be treasured by humanity at large. The last phase of his life outshone even the magnificent deeds of his earlier years. He wrote : "I am striving to become the best cement between the two communities. My longing is to be able to cement the two with my blood, if necessary."[116] How prophetic were these words !

Gandhi was an anti-communalist *par excellence.* He interpreted all religions as clarion calls for the establishment of human brotherhood. He stood for a secular state[117] permeated by the spirit of democratic human values.

The tragic fact, however, emerges that despite the intensity and extension of the nationalist movement, inter-communal relations grew from bad to worse and culminated in the vivisection of the country.

Gandhi, inspite of his superhuman efforts, could not prevent the country from being divided into two parts because it was in the process of the growth and development of 'two nationalisms' in our country. Gandhi traced the roots of the Hindu-Muslim

antagonism not to the material life-processes of the Indian society but to the weak ethical structure of the people.[118] And therein lay the limitations of his noble humanistic attempts to cement the two communities. This comment is offered not to underrate his ideal of communal unity, nor even to minimise his greatness, but to look at that greatness in its true socio-historical perspective which enables one to measure greatness correctly and adequately, if greatness can at all be measured.

A spate of criticism has been made both during his lifetime and after his death that his approach to the communal problem was all wrong, that he by invocation of Hindu terminologies like *Rāma Rājya* alienated the Muslim masses from the sphere of nationalist movement, etc. Whether those appraisals, if they are worth anything, will stand the test of objective analysis are for the historians to judge.

Interpreters and commentators may busy themselves in finding out whether his efforts were crowned with success or ended in tragic failure but the posterity shall certainly acclaim him as one of the noblest spirits that walked upon this earth. The solutions he suggested might have betrayed inadequate comprehension of the problem but the high idealism that he preached and symbolized in his being shall for ever be a constant source of inspiration to all those who want to establish a new order based on human love and brotherhood. And who knows not that idealism sustains ?